Europe
From the Post-Wall Era to Post-Crisis Future
Time for Paradigme Change

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Cover page picture Bojan Stojčić, “Viva la Transicion”; black enamel painting of a tram (model Tatra K2), 6 April 2015. This mobile installation circulated for one month. The picture was taken in front of Željeznička Stanica (railway station).

This tram was produced between 1966 and 1983 in Czechoslovakia by the company ČKD Tatra. The model “Tatra K2” was the first articulated tramcar in production. Some 90 of these trams were bought in the seventies by Yugoslavia and named, therefore, “K2YU” (YU for Yugoslavia). All trams went to Sarajevo and are still running.

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Introduction

In 2016, the European Union welcomed as member states: Iceland; Macedonia; Montenegro; and Serbia. 2017, Scotland, that had just left the UK, joined the EU bloc. In 2018, the EU collapsed.

This was the narrative of the art project that Thomas Bellinck exhibited in 2013 in Brussels – a welcome, ironic and provocative “reality check”. The Flemish artist conceived the “House of European History in Exile” as a fake museum: the year is 2063 and the Friends of a Reunited Europe have organised the “first international exhibition on life in the former European Union.”

The intention is to remember the time when “people everywhere used a single currency called the Euro,” when “national borders were blurred” and when Brussels was the heart of the old continent. Meanwhile, after the 2014 elections and the spectacular breakthrough of nationalist parties, and under the weight of its contradictions, the EU disintegrated in 2018. And “Europe dwindled to what it had always been: a politically-divided continent.”

Bellinck, who believes in the European project, presented a worst-case scenario because of the necessity “to consider all the possibilities of how it could go wrong. I think we’re at a turning point, definitely.”

This essay wants to question the “turning point” rhetoric – often applied to the fate of central and eastern Europe and the European Union. Sequencing the European integration process, this essay envisions first the post-wall Europe era (1989-2009); and, second, Europe in crisis (2009-2018). Actually, the notion of “crisis” applies to both periods, albeit in different terms: an “immobility crisis” characterised the 2000s; while the “global crisis” did so in the late 2000s and the “transformation crisis” the mid-2010s.

The first section reviews the post-wall Europe era (1989-2009), focusing on central and eastern Europe. Following a widely-accepted typology, central and eastern Europe refers to the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), central Europe or the Visegrád Group (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary), and south-east Europe (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Slovenia). For the purposes of this essay, the “western Balkans” (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia) are included – see Maps 1 and 2.

A renewed approach to the 2004 enlargement spotlights the re-evaluation of the multiple transformation to democracy and liberalism – and to nation-state for the post-Yugoslav republics and the Baltic States. The “cotransformation paradigm” enables a new understanding of transformation and of EU integration processes that reformulates the “east-west divide”. Paradoxically, precisely at the very moment Europe reunited, serious divergences surfaced over Europe’s political, economic and social model, over its

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2 I follow convention, using interchangeably the terms “Europe”, the “European Union”, the “Union”, the “EU” — except where the context needs them to be clearly differentiated.
3 See Attila Ágh, “The increasing core-periphery divide and member states”, in José M. Mangone et al. (Eds.) Core-Periphery Relations in the European Union (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 117.
international identity and over its frontiers. Were these the first signals of the forthcoming distorted Europeanisation — thus symptoms of de-Europeanisation and de-democratisation?

Maps 1 and 2: Central and eastern Europe 1989 and 2009


The second section considers thoroughly the European Union in the years from 2009-18. To put it bluntly, the first period here considered was characterised in central and eastern Europe as a transition to democracy, while the current one may be branded as a transition from democracy to “post-democracy”. Euphemistically referred to as an “age of uncertainty”, Europe – not only central and eastern Europe – faces a de-consolidation of democracy. Is the global crisis initiating a reverse wave of democratisation?

In Claus Offe’s words: “The European Union finds itself at a crossroads between something considerably better or something much worse than the plainly unsustainable status quo; in other words, in a continuing crisis”. Indeed, an undermined Europe faces a “polycrisis”: crisis in economics (banking, debt, currency, growth, inequality, cohesion and work); an institutional and political crisis; and also a crisis of imagination and trust. Among the key scenarios usually considered to break the deadlock – disintegration, dilution or fragmentation,

muddling through, further integration (federalism) and radical change – this essay will focus on the last two.

A paradigm change is prompted by a new understanding of the post-1989 period, by Europe’s multi-layered and polycentric nature and by the magnitude of the new world order’s changes. The Union’s instruments and strategies are thus no longer appropriate for tackling the challenges of the twenty-first century. As pinpointed by Jan Zielonka, “The EU cannot be consolidated: it ought to be reinvented.”

This intimates a major institutional overhaul of the EU, a complete re-think of its integration policy and, accordingly, an introduction of new procedures for enlargement. Such a perspective, further detailed in our last section, would reload the Balkan accession, strengthen the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and constitute a tailored framework to envision constructive relations with Turkey and Russia.

Of course, a variety of trajectories coexist in central and eastern Europe (CEE) as well as in the “west”. Each country had a distinctive historical background before communism, evolved along different paths under state socialism and took diverse ways of development with distinct results in the transformation after 1989. Still, certain common patterns and issues are observable and will command our attention while reviewing the post-Wall era (1989-2009) as well as the current period.

The global trend in the early 1990s was to seek to capture the overall global regional picture. The main tendency was, later on, to undertake detailed country-specific research, emphasising in a comparative perspective the differences between countries, regions and even cities. Relying on theoretical and empirical, country-specific as well as on comparative perspectives, the time has come to combine these approaches. Our objective is thus to shed new light on the issues at stake, moving towards a hybridisation of structural factors and individual ones. Last but not least, instead of considering disjointedly the post-Yugoslav area, our case-based and comparative approach views the fate of the post-Yugoslav states in a global regional framework.

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1. Post-Wall Europe and its Paradoxes


Discussing the question “Does central Europe exist?” back in 1986, Timothy Garton Ash made the point: “Central Europe is a kingdom of the spirit.” György Konrád’s words echoed: “To be central European is a world view (Weltanschauung) not a state affiliation (Staatangehörigkeit). It is a challenge to the ruling system of clichés.” This represented a challenge to the priorities and values widely accepted in the “west”. Today, we may ask, if central Europe still exists, whether it has changed its priorities and values — or whether its original viewpoints need to be re-opened.

With the breakdown of state socialism (1989), of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1991), of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1991) and of Czechoslovakia (1993), Europe’s post-War order collapsed. Unprecedented political, social and economic changes happened at a breathtaking pace in a rapidly-changing environment. In a highly volatile and unstable geopolitical context, central and eastern Europe supposedly underwent a multi-faceted “transition process”: from planned economy to neoliberalism; from “real existing socialism” to constitutional democracy; from the Soviet bloc to the Council of Europe and the European Union; and from the Soviet-led military alliance the Warsaw Treaty Organisation (WTO) to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

Often used in the 1990s, the above-mentioned “transition framework” clearly exaggerates the allegedly coherence of the respective models, overlooks the heterogeneity of post-socialist paths and oversimplifies, with undue generalisations, what indeed amounts to a highly complex and multidimensional process.

1.1.1.

To start with, a variety of trajectories must be considered. First, to state the obvious, not all central and east European countries were, to the same extent, part of the Soviet-led alliance system — the Warsaw Pact (WTO) and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON). Second, distinct pathways of the breakdown of state socialist systems and the re-creation of political rule may be identified: transitions from above (the Baltic republics, Bulgaria and Romania); negotiated transitions (Hungary and Poland); collapse (Czechoslovakia and Albania); and a mix of fragmentation and reconstruction (Yugoslavia).
Additionally, this transformation framework was completed, for some countries, by the creation of an independent nation state.

Claus Offe’s approach attempts to capture the various dimensions. Offe considers – at macro-, meso- and micro-levels – the economic, political and national-cultural modes of integration in the early 1990s. He assumes that each country predominantly prioritised one of these modes. His classification (reproduced in Table 1) permits us to describe and significantly contrast the trajectories of six central and east European countries in transition.

Table 1: A Classification of (post-)Communist states

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration of transition or breakdown</th>
<th>CSR and GDR</th>
<th>Hungary and Poland</th>
<th>Bulgaria and Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short</td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Very short</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of transition</th>
<th>CSR and GDR</th>
<th>Hungary and Poland</th>
<th>Bulgaria and Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capitulation of old regime</td>
<td>Party competition/election</td>
<td>Compromise</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geo-strategic location</th>
<th>CSR and GDR</th>
<th>Hungary and Poland</th>
<th>Bulgaria and Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Front-line states</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Remote from western Europe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industrial output per capita before 1989</th>
<th>CSR and GDR</th>
<th>Hungary and Poland</th>
<th>Bulgaria and Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of “nationalist” integration</th>
<th>CSR and GDR</th>
<th>Hungary and Poland</th>
<th>Bulgaria and Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Precarious to non-existent</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of repressiveness</th>
<th>CSR and GDR</th>
<th>Hungary and Poland</th>
<th>Bulgaria and Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elite continuity before/after 1989</th>
<th>CSR and GDR</th>
<th>Hungary and Poland</th>
<th>Bulgaria and Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional change of economic system</th>
<th>CSR and GDR</th>
<th>Hungary and Poland</th>
<th>Bulgaria and Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rapid</td>
<td>Slow</td>
<td>Delayed</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prospects for integration into EC</th>
<th>CSR and GDR</th>
<th>Hungary and Poland</th>
<th>Bulgaria and Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favourable</td>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>Very remote</td>
<td></td>
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<th>Nature of ethnic minority conflict</th>
<th>CSR and GDR</th>
<th>Hungary and Poland</th>
<th>Bulgaria and Romania</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>External minorities in neighbouring countries</td>
<td>Internal minority with ties to neighbouring country</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Record of economic reforms</th>
<th>CSR and GDR</th>
<th>Hungary and Poland</th>
<th>Bulgaria and Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extensive up to 1968; thereafter discontinued</td>
<td>Continuous, increasing after 1968</td>
<td>No significant reforms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Record of internal opposition</th>
<th>CSR and GDR</th>
<th>Hungary and Poland</th>
<th>Bulgaria and Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weak and late</td>
<td>Strong and continuously increasing</td>
<td>Very weak due to repression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constitutional development after 1989</th>
<th>CSR and GDR</th>
<th>Hungary and Poland</th>
<th>Bulgaria and Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only after territorial re-organisation</td>
<td>Gradual revision of old constitution</td>
<td>Rapid adoption of new constitution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of private sector</th>
<th>CSR and GDR</th>
<th>Hungary and Poland</th>
<th>Bulgaria and Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small and decreasing</td>
<td>Big and increasing</td>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious structure</th>
<th>CSR and GDR</th>
<th>Hungary and Poland</th>
<th>Bulgaria and Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Protestant</td>
<td>Roman Catholic majority</td>
<td>Orthodox Catholicism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International crises</th>
<th>CSR and GDR</th>
<th>Hungary and Poland</th>
<th>Bulgaria and Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dramatic (1953, 1961, 1968)</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prevailing mode of societal integration</th>
<th>CSR and GDR</th>
<th>Hungary and Poland</th>
<th>Bulgaria and Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic success</td>
<td>National identity</td>
<td>Political repression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Following the division of Czechoslovakia, which took effect in 1993, Slovakia should increasingly be considered in the same category as Bulgaria and Romania.

Evidencing the plurality of nationally-specific transitional paths, such a finding prompts a quite stable form of classification:

[...] there are two cases in the category of societies integrated primarily through economic success: namely, the GDR [German Democratic Republic] and the CSR [Czechoslovakia]; then there are Poland and Hungary, which are integrated predominantly through national identity; and lastly we have Romania and Bulgaria, which are, above all, integrated by means of (repressive) political rule.10

Third, political economy matters. As Dorothee Bohle and Béla Greskovits note: “Once the socialist system fell apart, its pieces began to move on different but patterned rather than random trajectories, which produced a diversity of market societies instead of a single variant.”11 Against the background of the interaction of government, corporatism, welfare state, the market, macroeconomic co-ordination and the quality of democracy, the authors’ comparative study maps three types of post-socialist political economies, respectively branded as “neoliberal,” “embedded neoliberal” and “neocorporatist,” according to the vigour with which, and the forms in which, transformative actors have used state power to build market economies:

The distinctive features of the Baltic neoliberal regime consist of a combination of market radicalism with meager compensation for transformation costs, together with severe limitation of citizens’ and organized social groups’ influence in democratic politics and policy-making. In turn, the Visegrád states’ embedded neoliberalism is characterized by a permanent search for compromises between market transformation and social cohesion in more inclusive but not always efficient systems of democratic government. Slovenia has combined the least radical strategy of marketization with the region’s most generous efforts to compensate transformation’s losers. Moreover, uniquely in the postsocialist world, this country exhibits many features of a democratic corporatist polity, where negotiated multilevel relationships among business, labour and the state orient political rivals toward compromise solutions. Finally, we propose that via different paths and with delays, Bulgaria and Romania have adopted many features of the neoliberal model and Croatia those of the embedded neoliberal regime.12

Following Karl Polanyi’s approach, the authors’ analysis connects most interestingly the concepts of nation building and state capacity (including the dimensions of social cohesion and political legitimacy) with economic regime formation; thus linking the political and economic spheres.

1.1.2.

The transition paradigm mostly suggests that the “east” – a political misnomer produced by the Cold War – and consisting actually of central and eastern Europe, including former Yugoslavia, needed to change while the “west” was supposed to remain as it was. The embraced strategy was based not on re-unification but on “accession”: political alignment built on the EU’s intrusive package of political and economic conditionality. Accordingly, the “east” adopted norms and rules, the institutions and the regulatory frameworks defined by the “west” – by that time, the fifteen EU members plus the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and, since 1998, the European Central Bank (ECB). So the narrative says.

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12 Bohle & Greskovits Capitalist Diversity on Europe’s Periphery, p. 3.
Germany best exemplifies this schema: calls to amend the German constitution in 1990 – former civil rights activists from East Germany (GDR) asked for the inclusion of more elements of direct democracy and more basic social rights — were purely rejected. Noteworthy is that the Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Basic Law) has never been submitted to a popular vote: neither the original version in 1949 nor the amended West German Basic Law in 1990. German unification was thus based not on state merger, but on the 1990 “accession” of the five new Länder plus the eastern part of Berlin; or, to put it differently, on the expansion of the FRG to include the territory of the former GDR — on the basis of Article 23 of the Basic Law. The Unification Treaty was signed on 31 August 1990 and came into force on 3 October. By approving the Treaty on 20 September, the GDR dissolved itself.13

Accordingly, the transformation process in the GDR was unique. Offe notes: “Owing to the dominant role played there by external forces, the GDR’s case had less to do with a transformation from above or from below and more with a change from outside.”14 Instead of the path to Europe, the GDR took the path to Germany. And East Germany was condemned to “learning”. Accession as Anschluss, lamented Stefan Heym — the famous East German writer who supported the civil rights movement during the 1980s.15

It matters to remind ourselves that the West German Basic Law was initially conceived as a temporary constitutional framework for a provisional state, assuming that an eventual reunified Germany would eventually adopt a new constitution — a possibility clearly envisioned by Article 146 of the Basic Law but not enacted.16 All in all, East Germany’s population, to use Offe’s words, was “Prevented from effectively taking part in the redesign of the social order” as well as from making “Its own, morale-discerning contribution towards shaping its own future.”17

Albeit its unique mode of transformation, the East German case stands for the “alignment paradigm” systematically applied to all CEE countries. For hexogeneous actors, the alternatives were, initially, not considered: possible alternative strategies were rarely projected and almost no-one raised the issue of what the “west” might be able to learn or adopt from the “east”. The very notion of “backwardness” and “lags” of central and eastern European countries framed the Europeanisation paradigm as well as the “export strategies”.

We may ask if Europe would have been different if politics and the public in the “west” had opened a serious debate on the values of the 1989 revolution — such as “living in truth”, the “parallel polis”, the creation of “civil society” and “anti-political politics” – as promoted by the dissidents.18 The “return of Europe” would, we might imagine, have become different than one-sidedly adjusting to the “west”.

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14 Offe Varieties of Transition, p. 148.
16 See Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland (1949). Available at: https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/BJNR000010949.html. [last accessed on 23 March 2018].
17 Offe Varieties of Transition, p. 151 and p. 152.
The gap emerges when taking into account that the EU never spelled out clearly the vision of Europe for which it was striving. In 1985, the then President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, even warned that the EU might well become, in some 30 or 40 years, an “unidentified political object” (UPO). Efficiency, not democracy, was the key; technocrats dominated policy-making and were disconnected from politics and the concerns of citizens. Sabrina Ramet and Peter Wagner emphasise:

> Lack of civic and political engagement and the turn to “radical” political parties and movements are symptoms that point in a clear direction. What ails the people in both the new East and the new West is a lack of democratic venues and a lack of democratic transparency and accountability on the part of the overall political system – and thus the failure of that most noble of promises that “1989-91” harboured: democracy itself.”

Thus, a pragmatic understanding of democratisation, integration and cohesion might be the solution to what ails societies, both in the “east” and the “west”. Amitai Etzioni’s value-driven approach of integrative networks engaging in moral dialogues precisely strengthens integration, stimulates a sense of community and illustrates that past values may well be reloaded.

1.1.3.

The above-mentioned transformation process is often presented as if it would have merely consisted of the adoption and implementation of what “worked well in the west”: foreign-driven “imposed” reforms, typically EU rules and norms as formulated notably by the *acquis communautaire*. But it turns out that the adoption of these changes involved in the “east” a broad spectrum of strategies ranging from adoption to adaptation and mitigating; from circumvention and reinterpretation to opposition and resistance.

The latter becomes more visible when the long-standing heritages, organisation and structure of groups, and sectoral and national interests, are considered. Widening the perspective, Gernot Grabher and David Stark suggested in 1997 paying attention to “circuit-breakers” and, further so: “With the concepts of compartmentalization, asset ambiguity and local ecologies of meaning we can proceed to analyse how actors reconfigure legacies, linkages and localities to forge pathways from state socialism.”

The Slovenian case provides an interesting illustration. Jeffrey Sachs came to Ljubljana in 1992 to propose an IMF plan for privatisation, but then Deputy Prime Minister Jože Mencinger and other Slovenian economists were strongly in opposition. Mencinger’s statement has to be quoted: “We listened to them, but didn’t follow their advice. Their agenda was based on ideology, not economics. And the US advisors didn’t see a difference between

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19 Speech by Jacques Delors on 9 September 1985 at the first Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) in Luxemburg. See also his speech delivered in March 2001: “Where is the European Union heading?” Both are available at: [www.cvce.eu](http://www.cvce.eu) [last accessed 6 April 2018].

20 Ramet and Wagner “Post-Socialist Model of Rule in Central and Southeastern Europe”, p. 32.


Slovenia and Mongolia.” 24 Ultimately, the chosen macroeconomic agenda diverged from the IMF advice. Bohle and Greskovits note, strikingly:

Resistance to external pressures for the banking sector’s hurried Europeanisation in the course of EU accession helped the Bank of Slovenia to succeed with the main task of Europeanisation after accession, namely compliance with the Maastricht criteria for macroeconomic convergence. 25

Unlike the dominant viewpoint, resistance to change may, paradoxically, foster change.

This has shed new light on “dependency”, oft-taken for granted. Instead, multiple locally-driven strategies amounting to “self-transformation” should be seen as “re-combination”, “ownership” and “hybridisation” processes, 26 except for the GDR (see below). And these practices were present before, as well as after, 1989 – as David Stark notes:

If by the 1980s the societies of Eastern Europe were decidedly not systems organized around a single logic, they are not likely in the post-socialist epoch to become, any more or less than our own, societies with a single system identity. Change, even fundamental change, of the social world is not the passage from one order to another but rearrangements in the patterns of how multiple orders are interwoven. Organizational innovation in this view is not replacement but recombination. 27

Not only Slovenia but also other central and east European countries were not passive receivers of democratisation and modernisation packages. The west’s export strategies need thus to be nuanced, as Jan Drahokoupil and Martin Myant advocate:

“[The] high level of foreign ownership and control over their economies has justified a claim that these [CEE] countries have developed a form of dependent capitalism. There are reservations to the characterisation of economic dependency. The conventional understanding rightly emphasizes dependence on outside know-how and technology, but overstates the degree to which economic structures are vulnerable, or unsustainable, and one-sidedly dependent on decisions taken in other countries.” 28

A comparative study undertaken in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary by the same authors tends to demonstrate that employment relations developed not from the transfer of an outside system but from a complex interaction between the conceptions and aims of different actors coming from different institutional settings. 29 Drahokoupil and Myant further distinguish economic dependency from institutional dependency. Multinational companies

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25 Bohle & Greskovits Capitalist Diversity on Europe’s Periphery, p. 213.
focused on the first, but they are also negotiating with local actors. Strikingly, the findings of this case study illustrate that “The element of economic dependency (...) gave support to a role in society for labour which stood as a barrier to the unrestricted hegemony of neoliberal thinking.”

Focusing on these, and other, case studies thus enables a more accurate analysis, opens the way to different viewpoints and avoids abstract thought. Putting detailed empirical accounts of post-socialist trajectories in a wider context, dependency proves to be partial and negotiated in the interaction between multiple foreign and domestic actors. Additionally, the emergence of a distinctive central and east European capitalism may be acknowledged.

David Stark’s captivating account of the recombinatory logic of property relations in Hungary exemplifies this. In contrast to essentialist categories of “state” and “private property”, instead of an abstract shift from a socialist to a liberal paradigm, and taking for granted the privatisation of public enterprises and assets, Stark found “New forms of property in which the properties of private and public are dissolved, interwoven and recombined”. His analysis of the adaptive efficiency of Hungarian recombinant property (inter-enterprise ownership) demonstrates that:

Capitalisms are diverse, and that diversity is manifested in forms that cannot be adequately conceptualized as mixtures of capitalism and socialism. By analysing recombinant property not only as the dissolution and interweaving of elements of public and private but also as a blurring of organizational boundaries in networks of interlocking ownership, we can escape, for example, the terms of the debate about whether the “lessons of East Asia for Eastern Europe” are the virtues of neo-liberalism or of neo-statism. Instead we join economic sociologists who are studying the East Asian economies from a network-centred approach in which not markets, nor states, nor isolated firms, but social networks are the basic units of analysis.

Strikingly, as Stark highlights, “The hedging strategies and boundary-blurring in post-socialist reconstruction, it seems, find counterparts in some of the technologically most highly sophisticated sectors of North American and West European capitalism”. Corporate networks analysis thus paves the way to a new understanding of regional variants and to the depth and length of the ongoing transformation process in central and eastern Europe. Further, it fits with our tentative approach of a “networked Europe,” further discussed in our final section.

Our analysis requests that we additionally integrate other layers, often neglected until recently, in the literature. First, hexogeneous actors – such as multinational companies and intergovernmental organisations – have proven to be unexpectedly less intrusive than first imagined and have had to take into account the above-mentioned strategies. The transformation paradigm thus overestimated homogeneity and neglected the diversity of export agents’ strategies. Second, “self-transformation” matters. Central and eastern European countries have, indeed, themselves influenced their post-socialist paths. Past legacies – notably the nature of pre-communist and communist state legacies – seem to have had both a short-term impact, thus during the immediate post-Wall era, as well as a long-term one.

30 Drahokoupil & Myant “Dependent Capitalism and Employment Relations in East Central Europe”, p. 56.
31 Stark “Recombinant Property in East European Capitalism”, p. 54.
33 Stark “Recombinant Property in East European Capitalism”, p. 58.
Combining these layers leads towards an interactive paradigm combining multi-faceted dependencies.\textsuperscript{35}

This transformation process unfolded, mostly peacefully, everywhere in central and eastern Europe, but not so in former Yugoslavia.\textsuperscript{36} Nevertheless, the same dynamic of balanced external influences – albeit more intrusive than in central and eastern Europe – and weak home-grown ownership strategies were also there at stake, notably in the current never-ending post-war period (this concerns, of course, more specifically Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Kosovo).

Neo-corporatism in Slovenia, widespread state weakness, nationalism and war (in former Yugoslavia) and marked financial and economic downturn – prompting the ongoing destabilisation of political life – in the late 2000s have turned the Balkans (including Bulgaria and Romania) into the most heterogeneous sub-region in terms of regime variety and stability. Consequently, external actors as the IMF and the EU, have become more intrusive. As for Bulgaria, Romania and the western Balkans, the EU has focused on harsh conditionality and close monitoring, threatening repeatedly to postpone membership if reforms were not implemented in a timely fashion. Paradoxically, and noteworthy in contradiction to the conditionality of regional co-operation, the EU accession process has, at different speeds and in its regionalisation programmes, increased regional fragmentation and the region’s heterogeneity.\textsuperscript{37}

1.1.4.

This transformation process in the “east” – admittedly global trends likewise – exerted oft-overlooked effects in the “west”. The following juxtaposes a series of different sequences at random in order to attempt to capture the “polyphony” at work.

To begin with, the “Americanisation” of the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1960s went far deeper than the “Sovietisation” of the German Democratic Republic.\textsuperscript{38} As for the latter, David Stark delivers the rationale:

> The numerous studies from Eastern Europe [...] are documenting parallel and contradictory logics in which ordinary citizens were already experiencing, for a decade prior to 1989, a social world in which various domains were not integrated coherently. (…) Through survey research and ethnographic studies, researchers have identified a multiplicity of social relations that did not conform to officially prescribed hierarchical patterns.\textsuperscript{39}

Later on, the other way round: Warsaw, Kraków and Prague, benefiting from the boom years after EU enlargement, surpassed Berlin, but small towns in the German Ruhr region mirrored the typical image of communist towns. Did the “West” become, after 1989, partially like the east, and vice versa?

\textsuperscript{35} See the very convincing case study presented by Ilona Huned and John Geary “Institutional transition, Power Relations and the Development of Employment Practices in Multinational Companies operating in Central and Eastern Europe”, in Violaine Delteil & Vassil Kirov (Eds.) Labour and Social Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 60-76.

\textsuperscript{36} See Marina Glamocak La transition guerrière (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2002).

\textsuperscript{37} See Solioz Thinking the Balkans Out of the Box; and Bohle & Greskovits Capitalist Diversity on Europe’s Periphery, p. 220.


\textsuperscript{39} Stark “Recombinant Property in East European Capitalism”, p. 35.
At another level, reform practices and discourses in central and eastern Europe clearly influenced the German pension reform and flat-tax systems. These reforms, involving serious cuts in the welfare state and in the social security system, were also introduced in order that Germany’s eastern neighbours no longer had a competitive advantage in terms of labour costs. As Ther summarises:

Germany, too, went through a process of catch-up modernisation, motivated by a sense of having fallen behind as a country. It was a new experience for it to be measured not only against the West but in some respects also against the reform-hungry East.40

Additionally, the failure of state socialism in central and eastern European countries considerably undermined the left in the “west” and introduced major shifts in European social democracy and the radical left. 41 The time for “real existing socialism” and “Eurocommunism” was over; and so the left-right balance consequently changed. The shockwaves lasted long, and today’s politics is no longer about left or right: this paves the way for previously unthinkable alliances as well as for new political movements which get rid of the old ideological dividing lines, as best illustrated by the Italian movement Cinque Stelle (M5S) and the new French party La République en marche. 42

In the new political environment, Germany’s and Europe’s “reunification” became a key political issue at national state level, introducing a new cleavage at the level of national party systems in almost all EU countries, thus bringing profound change to the European political landscape. Among the issues openly discussed: on the one hand, the financial costs of unification 43 and enlargement; and, on the other hand, labour migration waves from the “east”. The subsequent 2008-09 and 2015 crises (discussed in our next section) would only sharpen the politicisation of European issues across the EU. Along the new cleavages, there were also some new figures: some politicians coming from the “east” made their career in the “west” – among them, Angela Merkel (Chancellor of Germany from 2005) and Joachim Gauck (President of Germany from 2012 to 2017).

The question as to “What kind of Europe is emerging subsequent to these east-west transformation processes?” thus raises the issue of the “co-transformation” of east and west, notably the oft-eluded question of whether, and how, transformations in the “east” influenced the “west”. Tony Judt’s 2005-published Postwar. A History of Europe Since 1945 introduced this approach, which was recently further developed by Philipp Ther – who suggests that we distinguish among various models: loose connections; correlations (causal connections); and interdependence (necessary and mutual connections). All in all, east-west transfers consider adoption or adaptation strategies and the processes of demarcation.44

40 Ther Europe since 1989, p. 279.
41 See the overview provided by Marcello Musto “The Post-1989 radical Left in Europe”, Socialism and Democracy, 31 (2017) 2, pp. 1–32; and Ofie Varieties of Transition, pp. 189-202.
43 Particularly visible in Germany with the “solidarity tax” introduced in 1991 – in this way, German taxpayers co-financed German unity. Noteworthy is that the same tax covered the additional costs of the then Gulf War (Operation Desert Storm) and its consequences, as well as support for countries in central, eastern and southern Europe. This solidarity surcharge was 7.5% of the tax payment (July 1991-June 1992 and 1995-1997) and 5.5% (1998-present). Information provided by German Tax Advisors (WW+KN).
This process was already active in the sixties and seventies – as the “east” moderately adopted market elements and the “west” integrated aspects of state intervention – as discussed by convergence theories. However, co-transformation had diverse fates in the west and in the east:

The problem with this theory, as is now becoming apparent, was that only the West was capable of “mixing”, whereas the socialist societies were constantly on the verge of “capsizing” through concessions made to political liberalization (party competition, freedom of opinion), national independence, decentralized forms of ownership and competitive price formation, to say nothing of “economic democracy.”

Considering the post-Wall era, we may think at first that only a few countries from the “west” would have been “hit” by the successive waves of enlargement – i.e. the neighbourhood countries of Germany, Austria, Italy, Sweden and Finland. Of course these were directly affected by the post-1989 reforms and changes in the “east”. Referring to the same countries, Ther highlights that “To an extent, these countries were compelled to reinvent themselves. Germany in particular underwent a process of co-transformation that transcended the Cold War boundaries.” As for Germany, the country had to face double competition on the labour market: the above-mentioned influx of labour migrant from the “east” and the enterprises relocating to the “east.”

Low labour costs appealed indeed to foreign investors: by 1990, the wage gap between the “east” and the “west” was 1:10; by 2004, it had been reduced by one-half. Firms considering outsourcing production rely on another set of data: the absolute levels of labour costs (see Table 2).

Table 2: Average hourly labour costs, euros

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czechia</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>32.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>8.6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>5.9</td>
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<td>7.4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>7.3</td>
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Note: data based on Eurostat.

These figures should be handled with care. Martin Myant pinpoints that “Neither the gaps nor the changes over such a short period seem plausible. (...) If taken seriously, these figures still suggest that a firm that outsources production uses substantially less productive workers.”

45 Offe Varieties of Transition, p. 29.
46 Ther Europe since 1989, respectively p. 9 and p. 32.
47 Obviously, offshoring in central and eastern Europe concerns not only Germany. It is noteworthy that this tendency started well before the formal EU entry of CEE countries. See Magdolna Sass and Martina Fifekova “Offshoring and Outsourcing Business Services to Central and Eastern Europe: Some Empirical and Conceptual Considerations”, European Planning Studies, 19 (2011) 9, pp. 1593-1609.
This inevitably seems contradictory. This sort of wages and productivity comparison may thus be misleading. Indeed, similar figures – related to Unit Labour Costs (ULC)⁴⁹ – have nurtured and distorted the European Commission’s analysis and policy recommendations.

The measure of competitiveness and comparison between countries requires a more complex explanation that lies beyond the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, the following example contributes to ensure we face what is at stake:

Škoda in Czechia, part of the Volkswagen group, pays its employees around a third of the German level. The difference does not reflect lower productivity in terms of cars produced. It is reflected in somewhat higher profits in the Czech plants, in a choice to locate production of cheaper models in those plants and probably also in the low transfer prices of components (notably engines and gearboxes) made in Czechia to other parts of the Volkswagen group. If pay were higher for workers producing Volkswagen engines in the Škoda plant, prices would be higher and the productivity of Czech workers would be measured as closer to that of German workers making the same product.⁵⁰

A more meticulous approach is certainly needed and would extend the field of view.

Considering now the labour migration from 2004, with some 600,000 central European workers (62 per cent of them being Polish) “invading” the UK between May 2004 and June 2006;⁵¹ and the actually very few “Polish plumbers” – personifying in France rival central European workers – supposedly “assaulting” the country. As a matter of fact, the influx of new migrants helped the UK emerge from recession, created additional jobs for Brits too and contributed to a welcome higher birth rate than most other EU countries.

Away from the resentment narrative, the “old” established EU countries – by that time the EU-15 states – mostly benefited from enlargement. As mutual trade resumed, the “west” has run a trade surplus while mutual trade has created a significant net gain of jobs in the “west.”⁵² Immigration benefited the host countries and had a direct impact on jobs and welfare schemes – a highly-sensitive issue. More generally, high levels of labour mobility across EU countries were, and still are, needed for a successful “single market” and an integrated eurozone. This is not to say that greater labour mobility automatically contributes to a better functioning of European labour markets.⁵³

As was already the case with previous accession countries (Greece in 1981; and Spain and Portugal in 1986), social dumping – actually low-cost competition perceived as “unfair” – and immigrant labour “exploiting” a country’s social welfare system (an assertion not backed by any evidence) became major issues conglomerated with the new wave of enlargement.⁵⁴

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⁴⁹ Unit labour costs are a measure of the relationship between labour productivity and labour costs, the second of these being divided by the first to show the cost of labour for the production of a unit of output.
⁵¹ UK Home Office minister Tony McNulty, interviewed by BBC. McNulty adds to the 447,000 registered self-employed workers. See http://news.bbc.co.uk [last accessed 28 March 2018].
⁵³ Béla Galgóczi and Janine Leschke highlight as critical issues over-qualification and the corresponding under-utilisation of central and east European migrant workers’ skills. See their Intra-EU Labour Migration after Eastern Enlargement and during the Crisis (Brussels: ETUI, Working Paper 20132.13).
Public resentment against migrants significantly increased in these years. Immigration progressively became a key preoccupation for many citizens. This issue was also a way for people to express first their doubts, and later on their hostility, to the very idea of European integration and cohesion.

The Yugoslav wars prompted, following 1991, various waves of migration and a serious Yugoslav refugee crisis in Europe –UNHCR mentions roughly 2.3 million people having fled their country – but the post-war years provoked new waves of economic migration, mostly of highly-skilled young people looking abroad for a better future. This new “brain drain” is a serious threat to the overall future of the region. It is notable that the Yugoslav migrant crisis (1991-2001) did not initiate massive populist protest movements as did the 2015 refugee crisis – which had a significantly lower influx but a much greater impact, as we will further discuss.

1.1.5.

Having these cases in mind, we immediately grasp the necessity of enlarging the lens and bringing “east” and “west” in closer relation to each other. Certainly, the breakdown of state socialism in central and eastern Europe did notably impact the “west” at various levels. As pinpointed by Anthony Giddens, for the European project as such: “The events of 1989 more or less completely transformed the nature of the EU, not just those countries that freed themselves from Communist rule.”

The first added-value of the co-transformation approach is to formulate software capturing the complex and multi-level “east-west transfer”, and to view east-west relations – during the Cold War as well as afterwards – as a “system of interconnected conduits,” as Philipp Ther suggests. We should note that precursory moves should be considered. We may mention here Egon Bahr’s “Wandel durch Annäherung” (change through rapprochement) policy of the early 1960s; the subsequent east-west détente, boosted by the Helsinki Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) in 1975; and the two oil crises (1973 and 1979), which paved the way for trans-bloc interactions, compromise, economic relations and thinking long before the late 1980s.

The second added-value is to depart from “methodological nationalism.” Political theory is overwhelmingly framed in a national perspective, so it is high time to explore other paths and thus to shift away from the classical state-centric, nation state-based and macro institutional approaches to oft-neglected micro-politics via a consideration of regional, urban and network level, and also firms as they are key actors in any economic system. Acknowledging these levels and various locally-driven strategies in channelling, mitigating or opposing foreign-driven intervention highlights the heterogeneity of central and eastern Europe as well as intra-state divergences, notably the uneven development between urban and rural regions.

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56 Egon Bahr delivered his famous Tutzing speech on 15 July 1963.
58 As for parallel structures and informal networks, see Grabher & Stark (Eds.) *Restructuring Networks in Post-socialism. Legacies, Linkages and Localities*.
Accordingly, the enlarged Union has to be viewed in a new way: beyond a state paradigm – that relies on central, hierarchical government and one-size-fits-all rules – a much more flexible and dynamic reality emerges: Europe as a multi-level and polycentric polity made of multiple, overlapping arenas and networks, as we will further discuss in the third section.

1.2. Paradoxes of the “return to Europe”

The EU Copenhagen summit of 2002 considered the central and eastern European eight candidate countries (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Hungary) were “about to complete” the transition to democracy and to market economies, as well as the demanding process of meeting the burdensome EU entry criteria. These countries thus became in 2004 new EU member states, joined in 2007 by Romania and Bulgaria, and in 2013 by Croatia.

Beyond the rhetoric of a “reunited Europe”, joining the EU in the 2000s was, for central and eastern European countries, essentially a way to preserve national sovereignty while achieving economic development. Thus “economic nationalism” may be seen as a form of state protectionism used to “safeguard” domestic economic actors. François Bafoil highlights:

One of the most remarkable characteristics of the transition during the first decade of the post-communist period was the widespread combination of a neo-liberal wave of foreign origin – exemplified by the desire to privatize the industrial bastions of the various governments – with the desire to maintain the national industrial patrimony in order to protect and defend national sovereignty.60

Looking closer, and considering survey data based on nationwide employment relations in the workplace, conducted in Hungary in 2010, we may fine-tune our analysis: some segments (public utility companies, retail trade and banks) indeed depend on government contracts – and here we may speak of state protectionisms and direct political influence – but others (industry and private sector business services) rely on foreign direct investment and on strategic partnership with key international investors.61 András Tóth coined successfully the notion of “selective economic nationalism” for the former.62

Widening now the perspective and considering the second period within the post-Wall era, the 2004-09 years, three paradoxes are worth considering in as much as they prefigure the current era.

The first paradox is that, in spite of the overall successful integration of central and eastern European countries, east-west divergences immediately re-emerged, targeting three core issues of the European project: first, foreign policy, essentially transatlantic relations (countries from the east supporting the USA); second, the social and economic model (new incoming members being accused of importing the Anglo-Saxon neoliberal model); and,

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60 Bafoil “The Limits of Europeanization in Central Europe”, p. 36.
The second paradox is that the smooth integration of new member states coincided with the Union’s constitutional debate crisis. The European Constitutional Treaty was formulated at the 2004 intergovernmental conference of member states. Its objectives were to: simplify the overlapping series of treaties which provide the current legal foundation for the EU; reaffirm the values on which the EU is built; establish the fundamental rights and duties of its citizens; clarify the relationship between Member States and the Union; and improve decision-making processes in the EU. France and the Netherlands rejected the proposed text, respectively on 29 May and 1 June 2005, and they buried, by the same token, the Constitutional Treaty – some aspects were, nevertheless, “saved” in the Treaty of Lisbon signed on 17 December 2007.

Integration and reform in the 2004-05 period were thus crisis-driven, but differently perceived in “east” and “west”. The new incomers were highly surprised to see countries torpedoing their own political project and France’s self-marginalisation. This was clearly a setback for the pro-Europeans, but a great relief for sovereigntists and eurosceptics such as Václav Klaus, President of the Czech Republic (2003-13), whose 2005 open editorial, published in the Financial Times, voices the typical arguments of today’s eurobashers.

Criticising the European project as elite-driven, Klaus highlights the Union’s democratic deficit, its excessive bureaucratisation and centralisation, as well as the “undigested, unnatural and therefore artificial multiculturalism”. Klaus’s rhetoric emphasises the “subsequent mass immigration which began to disrupt the historical coherence of European states,” and ends suggesting – as an alternative project to the “very fragile house of cards”, thus the EU – the creation of the Organisation of European States (OES). Rupnik comments that the rejection of the constitutional treaty “Broke a taboo. Previously, the mainstream political forces did not dare openly oppose the prospect of European integration, whereas now no-one is afraid of the consequences of questioning it at a fundamental level. After the rise in influence of intergovernmental thinking comes the triumphant return of the supporters of sovereignty.”

Beyond the failed agreement on the Constitution, citizens’ growing disenchantment surfaced, alongside profound disagreements. Precisely at the moment when the Union was about to achieve the idea of “ever-closer union”, the “no” vote destroyed any prospect of political union, boosted eurosceptics and paved the way for the current political crisis. In particular, the Treaty’s rejection may also be viewed as a vote protesting at the EU’s admission in 2004 – without popular consultation – of the ten new incomers, expressing additionally public opinion that “The 25-member union of today is an unworkable and unreasonable project.”

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67 Laurent Cohen-Tanugi “The End of Europe?” Foreign Affairs, 84 (2005) 6, p. 64.
Needless to say: the “western Balkans” were about to become the next victims of the moratorium – requested by France – on any further enlargement. All in all, it turns out that the constitution itself was not really at stake.

To complete the picture, another viewpoint has to be considered. Countries more successful in democratic consolidation, such as Hungary and Poland, opted for successive constitutional amendments and not, as in Balkans’ countries, for new constitutions – certainly approved by the Council of Europe, but poorly enacted. The lesson coming from the “east”, which is worth considering against the above-mentioned backlash against the European Constitution Treaty, is that constitutionalism may be more effective than drafting a new constitution.68

The third paradox deserves more attention as it anticipates the current state of affairs; it confronts us with a political landscape that would have been unthinkable prior to the EU accession of CEE countries. Rupnik provides a clear picture of the situation as regards 2006:

It is striking that most of the pro-European coalitions that dominated CEE politics over the last decade or so fell apart as soon as they had accomplished the “historic task” of achieving EU membership. In their places have arisen harder or softer exponents of Euroscepticism.69

The Eurobarometer survey of December 2006 revealed that trust in democratic institutions was much weaker in eastern than in western Europe. Additionally, the polls conducted by the Warsaw-based Public Opinion Research Centre (BSOS) disclosed that about half of respondents argued: “In some cases, a non-democratic regime may be preferable to a democratic one.”

By 2005-06, in most central European countries (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Slovenia), conservative populists came to power, sometimes in coalition with extreme-nationalist parties – although this was by no means an exclusively east and central European phenomenon. Former Polish presidents Lech Wałęsa and Aleksandar Kwaśniewski promptly denounced threats to democracy. Likewise, Adam Michnik, Editor-in-Chief of Polish daily Gazeta Wyborcza:

The governing coalition [Michnik refers here to the Poland of the Kaczyński twins] employs a peculiar mix of the conservative rhetoric of George W. Bush and the political practice of Vladimir Putin. Attacks on independent news media, curtailment of civil society, centralization of power and exaggeration of external and internal dangers make the political styles of today’s leaders of Poland and Russia very similar. Meanwhile, in Polish foreign policy, relations with Russia and Germany are marked by a preoccupation with events of the Second World War, including the Auschwitz concentration camp and the Soviet massacre of Polish officers in the Katyn forest. These obsessions lead to the isolation of Poland and a reawakening of the demons of European history.

I am writing about Poland, but what I say applies as well to many countries of post-Yalta Europe. Everywhere, the phenomenon of populism has appeared. Slovakia is ruled by an ethnic populist coalition every bit as exotic as the Polish government, including a party that proposed expelling the Hungarian minority.70

By 2007, it was still possible to think that, once populists and nationalists were in power, they might evolve into more traditional political party formations. Nowadays, we rather observe the inexorable pursuit of radicalisation and the inability of the EU to marginalise radical

68  I owe this argument to Rupnik “La crise de l’Union européenne vue d’Europe centrale”, pp. 128–129.
populists and to absorb the more moderate ones – both in “east” and in “west” Europe. In 2007, however, Rupnik could assert:

Europe is less vulnerable than other regions facing democratic regression. The new EU member states may share some symptoms of democratic malaise with Europe as a whole, but they also are protected by some specifically European limits to the rise of populism. 71

Today, we may barely think the same. It is high time to ask why “populists” are so popular and successful; and also what went wrong with the European project now under attack.

Contrary to the Euphoria narrative, the end of the post-Wall era appears today characterised by the immediate post-accession crisis introducing a period of de-consolidation discussed in the next section.

71 Rupnik “Is East-Central Europe Backsliding?”, p. 25.
2. Europe in Crisis (2009–2018)


2.1. End of the dream

By 2014, against the background of the simultaneous 25th anniversary of post-communist transition (1989) and the 10th anniversary of EU enlargement (2004), the assessment of Zsolt Darvas is, altogether, quite positive:

While progressing at a slower pace than their capitals, the anniversary members’ total economies have also generally converged towards the average of core EU countries since their accession, though there are some notable exceptions: Slovenia and Cyprus are now falling behind (...) and the Czech Republic and Hungary have not converged much in recent years. These country-specific differences likely reflect the varying ability of individual anniversary members to exploit the opportunities offered by EU membership.72

Assessing economic integration for the 1992-2002 period across the EU-15 (thus not including CEE countries), the Bertelsmann Foundation adapted an index previously developed by König and Ohr (2013). The Bertelsmann “integration index” shows that, first, every country – except for Greece – has been able to achieve higher per capita income due to European integration; and, second, while some countries took the smallest advantage from growing integration (as in Italy, Spain, Portugal and the UK), others have benefited significantly from it (Denmark, Germany, Austria and Finland).73 In general, northern countries were the “winners”, while those in the south were the “losers”.

Another study by Darvas deserves attention. The author interestingly questions whether overall convergence since the mid-1990s has compensated for the dramatic reduction in per capita incomes during the transition years. His analysis delivers a surprising picture: of the 29 post-communist countries considered, “Only 14 had a higher GDP per capita (at purchasing power parity) in 2014 relative to the 10 advanced EU countries as compared to before the

72 Darvas, “10 Years EU Enlargement Anniversary: Waltzing past Vienna”, 2014. NB : following countries may be considered a part of “core Europe”: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden and United Kingdom. Less developed economies of Southern, Central, Eastern and the Baltic belong to the “periphery”.

transition; while 1 had similar and 14 had lower”. Thus, one-half of post-communist countries did not converge during the past 25 years – among those that did were Poland, Albania, Slovakia and the Baltic countries.

Four main factors may explain this deficit in convergence (or de-convergence): first, the introduction of the eurozone (1999) for countries having met the “euro convergence criteria” (also called the Maastricht criteria); second, the Union did not provide adequate resources for the “big bang” enlargement after 2004; third, the 2007-08 crisis, that started as a financial crisis in the private banking sector and prompted in Europe simultaneously a financial market, sovereign debt and economic/employment crisis and, last but not least, a major institutional crisis; and fourth, the insufficient means available through the EU’s Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund. The Cohesion Fund seems a quite efficient tool to diffuse the EU’s multiple regional co-operation programmes, but it proves inadequate in tackling the situation of “deficit countries”, i.e. the increasing divide between countries in terms of indebtedness, growth and trade performance. The economical and political divide was acknowledged by the 1989 Delors Report, but fiscal federalism or adequate instruments able to deal with economic shocks were not envisioned.

These four factors also intensified the dualist nature of the European economy: thus the core-periphery divide. “Differentiated integration” (DI) produced a multi-floor Union. Attila Ágh sees four floors:

- Core 1 – “West-Continental”: features the fully effective membership of Eurozone members with deep integration and full decision-making capacity
- Core 2 – “Nordic EU”: refers to countries that have followed (almost) all common EU policies except for Eurozone membership
- Periphery 1 – “South”: includes countries that are Eurozone members at the legal level but have limited weight in actual EU decision-making processes
- Periphery 2 – “East”: corresponds to a group of new member states having fully marginal membership; even though some of them are Eurozone members, none of them – despite the growing influence of Poland – number among the real decision-makers.

Following Ágh, the global crisis’s consequence resulted in an “increasing differentiation between both Core-1 and Core-2 and between Periphery-1 (South) and Periphery-2 (East)” in which: “The decline of Periphery-1 is much more dangerous for Core-1, given that the South has been much more involved in asymmetrical Eurozone integration; thus, for Core-1, much more is at stake in the South than in the East.” The Union also shares some responsibility, as it considered DI only as a legal-technical instrument, neglecting the other DI dimensions – i.e.

75 See Solioz Thinking the Balkans Out of the Box.
77 See Mangone et al. (Eds.) Relations in the European Union; and Attila Ágh “The core-periphery divide in the EU transformation crisis: challenges to the Visegrád Four”, Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe, 14 (2016) 2, pp. 113–130.
78 Ágh “The increasing core-periphery divide and members states”, pp. 120–121.
respectively the political (decision-making process) and the polity (values) dimensions. In other terms; “quantitative catching-up” received priority, while “qualitative catching-up” was neglected.79

Nevertheless, in spite of these results, of the 2007-08 crisis, and of the core-periphery divide, five countries from central and eastern Europe joined the eurozone: Slovenia (2007), Slovakia (2009), Estonia (2011), Latvia (2014) and Lithuania (2015); while others are committed to following suit. Actually, the Euro crisis prompted, instead of an east/west divide, a new north (core)/south (periphery) one – the western Balkans belonging to the latter.

Considering now the catching-up of capital and intrastate divergences in the “east”, the trends mentioned in the previous section are confirmed. Warsaw, Bratislava and Prague have overtaken Vienna in terms of GDP per capita, while Budapest lags not far behind Vienna, but regional divergence has widened. Poorer regions showed much weaker convergence in 2000-11.80 Europe’s cohesion policy and regional strategies are thus exhibiting, if not poor, then certainly only modest results.

The overall positive assessment of the “smooth” and “successful” transformation and convergence processes in central and eastern Europe – getting “remarkable achievements” and providing “encouraging models”… to be applied elsewhere (particularly since the 2010s in southern Europe) – needs thus to be carefully checked, notably in the field of economics. Violaine Delteil and Vassil Kirov highlight:

More than twenty five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and ten years after the Central and Eastern Europe Countries (CEECs) acceded to the European Union (EU), they have still not lost their specificities and have not resolved all of the challenges they inherited or faced later in the transition and EU integration processes. This is particularly true in the field of labour markets, work and industrial relations, in which the CEECs still show original patterns which contribute to the socio-economic heterogeneity of the enlarged European Union. […] Key difficulties concern notably: low wages, precarious work, instrumentalised social dialogue and strong and continuous labour emigration (at least for some countries).81

By 2018, with a 30-year perspective on post-Wall history, a fine-tuned analysis would disclose another – more moderate and reasonable – narrative, speaking of “relative success”, “mixed results and failure”, “success, fragility and diversity”. A more pessimistic – or perhaps realist – one would characterise the same period as a failed try at democratisation, Europeanisation and the “convergence dream”.82

Considering the years between 2001 and 2013, Marek Dabrowski’s convergence analysis distinguishes two sub-periods: the first, until 2007-08, with rapid catching-up (convergence); and the second one, after 2008, with either de-convergence or no progress in further

79 On the diversity of economic models in the peripheries, and on the difference between periphery 1 and 2, see Béla Galgóczi, “The southern and eastern peripheries of Europe: Is convergence a lost cause?”, in José M. Mangone et al. (Eds.) Core-Periphery Relations in the European Union (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 130–145.
convergence. Notably for the latter: “The four EU new member states with the highest income per capita level in the early 2000s, i.e. Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Croatia, have recorded a continuous decline in their relative levels of GDP per capita, as compared to Germany after 2008.” Only Poland, Slovakia and Albania managed to continue their convergence, although at a very slow pace.

Figure 1 & 2: GDP per capita, Germany = 100, 2001-13, EU new member states and the Western Balkans


Note: GDP per capita (in current international dollars) is measured at purchasing power parity (PPP); data based on the IMF World Economic Outlook (October 2014).

Dabrowski’s analysis tends to show that, in the new economic and political environment, the EU’s transformative power seems very limited. Again, the above-mentioned factors, especially the lack of adequate convergence means, plays herein a crucial role. Additionally, the European Central Bank’s over-generalising (“one size fits all”) policy does not take into account the high heterogeneity of eurozone countries. Accordingly, the Euro becomes a heterogeneous currency.

All in all, instead of uniting, the Euro is disuniting. In Offe’s words: “The Euro has rendered European democratic capitalism more capitalist and less democratic.” Europe’s “order” is at a stage of disorder. With the fate of the Euro, the Union has passed a point of no return. Like Wolfgang Streeck, François Heisbourg suggests taking a few steps back, the better to leap forwards – i.e. abolishing the Euro and returning to national currencies. But it is naive to think that abolishing the eurozone would solve the crisis without dramatically affecting the Union as such – by the way, while Article 50 of the Treaty envisions a country break-up, no legal procurers consider the abolition of the Euro. The “trap” metaphor introduced by Claus Offe indicates that the Euro currency is an irreversible arrangement as well as a very difficult one to reform.

84 Offe Europe Entrapped, p. 43.
85 See the possible consequences of the dissolution of the eurozone envisioned by Offe in Europe Entrapped, pp. 48-55.
Greater flexibility, differentiated measures, debt mutualisation, welfare state remedies and a European social mode including, notably, unemployment insurance, social assistance/poverty relief and a “Youth Guarantee” should be introduced in order to respond to specifics of countries, to the situation produced by the financial crisis and also to win back citizens having lost confidence in the European project. These and similar measures are inconceivable within the framework of a return to the national arena of policy-making. They presuppose, instead, a strengthening of the supranational authority that “Would have to be turned into a supranational democracy, complete with mechanisms of territorial and functional representation, elected legislative bodies and accountable supranational governing agencies,” as Offe underlines. 86 Alas, precisely the Union level is more and more de-legitimised, being viewed as a supranational entity out of the control of citizens and depriving member states of their prerogatives. Notably, Europe as “foreign rule” is erroneously framed as a supranational state – as a matter of fact, the Union is a supranational non-state.

Figure 3: Support for European economic and monetary union with one single currency: national results

![Support for European economic and monetary union with one single currency](image)


Strikingly, in spite of increased loss in “net support” in the EU, 87 most citizens do not think of abandoning the Euro. More so, the common currency enjoys popular, and consistently rising, support: as of November 2017, 74 per cent of respondents were for the Euro; this is the highest score since Spring 2004. Accordingly, a majority of respondents favoured a European economic and monetary union with one single currency. 88 National results show, not surprisingly, that in seven countries, all located outside the euro area, a majority of

86 Offe Europe Entrapped, p. 119.
87 “Net support in the EU” has been calculated by the ECFR subtracting the people who “tend to trust the EU” from the people who “tend not to trust the EU”. See José Ignazio Torreblanca & Mark Leonard et al. The Continent-Wide Rise of Euroscepticism (Brussels: ECFR, Policy Memo 2013).
88 See European Commission Standard Eurobarometer, Nos. 34-88.
respondents say they are against the Euro: the Czech Republic (73% “against”), Sweden (71%), Denmark (63%), the United Kingdom (62%), Poland (57%), Croatia (52%) and Bulgaria (50%) – see Figure 3.

Paradoxically, there is a lack of democratic support, actually of the political will to introduce effective remedies aimed at saving the currency — i.e. the measures which require an additional transfer of sovereignty are, apparently, no longer welcomed. Looking to escape the trap, to counter the de-convergence and de-consolidation trends, the strategy of sovereignty transfer is indeed out-dated:

Confidence in the quasi-automatic adaptation of a neofunctionalist sort and its basis in the “permissive consensus” of constituencies is no longer warranted. The stakes involved have grown too high for that, and, instead of the neofunctionalist auto-pilot, “real” agency needs to step in and to engage in “political” (i.e. strategic, resourceful and contested rather than adaptive) action.  

Referring to the European Central Bank, the European Court of Justice and the European Commission, Fritz Scharpf highlights that precisely those EU institutions having the greatest impact on the daily life of people are those farthest removed from democratic accountability.  

Thus, the “trap” closes, as the ECB is currently not in a position to acquire new competencies because European Monetary Union (EMU) has already removed crucial instruments of macro- economic management from the control of democratically-accountable governments – and will thus not be permitted to do so again. Emphasising the relationship between economic crisis and the crisis of democratic legitimacy, Scharpf pinpoints:

EMU has systemically caused a destabilizing of the macroeconomic imbalances that member states found difficult or impossible to counteract with their remaining policy instruments. And even though the international financial crisis had its origins beyond Europe, EMU has greatly increased the vulnerability of some member states to its repercussions. Its effects have undermined the economic and fiscal viability of some EMU member states and have frustrated political demands and expectations to an extent that may yet transform the economic crisis into a crisis of democratic legitimacy. Moreover, present efforts by EMU governments to “rescue the euro” will do little to correct the economic imbalances and vulnerabilities, but are likely to deepen economic problems and political alienation in both the rescued and the rescuing polities.

Additionally, various built-in structural imbalances related to the European integration process need to be acknowledged. First, economic policies have been progressively Europeanised, but social protection policies (social welfare policies) have remained at national level. This explains the increasing “perverse” asymmetry between policies promoting market efficiencies and those promoting social protection and equality. Second, the current crisis has amplified citizens’ perceived “space inconsistency”: political measures are required to apply locally and not “far away”. And, third, the classical “time inconsistency”: while short-term strategies are welcomed, citizens resist to and obstruct long-term ones.

89 Offe Europe Entrapped, p. 57.
90 See Fritz Scharpf Problem Solving Effectiveness and Democratic Accountability in the EU (Vienna: Institute for Advanced Studies, 2006).
After the 2004 Constitution debate, the 2007-08 crisis and the current de-convergence, de-consolidation and de-democratisation period, the western Balkan’s EU membership perspective is more distant.  

Ostensibly, early warnings went unnoticed. Notably, Edgar Morin’s cautious and forewarning formulation from 2002 – thus, before the 2007-08 crisis and the 2015 European migrant crisis and outburst of populism:

I am afraid Europe will actually stall, even dissolve, because my assumption is that what does not regenerate degenerates. If Europe does not regenerate, she will degenerate. The possibility of virulent neo-nationalisms is one of the existing degeneration factors. To what extent these neo-nationalists’ manifestations eventually prevail, in different European countries, remains unknown. […] Reasonable predictions today exclude the return of past fascism to power, but forms of neo-dictatorships, neo-fascisms, post-fascisms, etc. cannot be excluded. One cannot exclude an intermediary neo-authoritarian system in Russia which, thanks to a pluralistic party government, cannot be totalitarian any more.

Fifteen years later, Ivan Krastev observes that crisis of identity and lack of confidence have instilled an atmosphere of “end of reign”:

I’m someone who believes that the disintegration train has left Brussels’s station — and who fears it will doom the continent to disarray and global irrelevance. […] It may cause the breakdown of liberal democracies on Europe’s periphery and usher in the collapse of several existing member states. Political, cultural, and economic cooperation won’t evaporate, but the dream of a Europe free and united probably will.

Might the European dream be lurching towards nightmare? Certainly, the Union’s finalités have lost their political appeal while Euroscepticism gains in political strength. A spectacular shift from light to dark has happened, captured by Timothy Garton Ash’s exclamation: “Ichabod! Ichabod! The glory has departed from our common European home.” An outcry echoing the, albeit naïve, 1989 narrative full of enthusiasm, visions of future glory and a future of liberty and prosperity.

2.2. Paradigm change

The multifaceted crisis radicalises criticism of the Union. Increasingly, citizens are turning away from the European project. Beyond the EU and the global economy, at stake is the fate of Europe, of democracy and of “open society”.

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93 There is increasing public support for further enlargement (42%) but, nevertheless, more citizens are against it: 47%; see European Commission Standard Eurobarometer, September 2017, No. 88.
Jan Zielonka spotlights the common denominator of “counter-revolutionary politicians”, often called populists: “They are against the order installed after the 1989 revolution. They attack not only those who ruled Europe after 1989, but also their key political projects: European integration, constitutional liberalism and neo-liberal economics”. Accordingly:

The real contest is between the winners of the post-1989 revolution and those who intend to topple them and dismantle the post-1989 system. The latter may well be “populist”, they may form tactical alliances, they may be neo-nationalists or post-Marxists, but they are first of all counter-revolutionaries with a mission.

Not only politicians, but also experts and intellectuals currently rank under that banner. Intellectuals were mostly supportive of the Europe project in the 1920s and after WWII, hostile during the Cold War years and sympathetic in the 1970s, but nowadays they adopt hyper-critical positions targeting the post-national paradigm, viewing the EU as a post-democratic construct ignoring the nation-state, even thinking that the EU has outgrown politics. There is nothing really new in this: the criticisms coined in the 1950s are reloaded: the a-democrat Monnet; the virtuous national *demos*; and the shadows of Empire – often a synonym for *Anschluss* or the “Fourth *Reich*”.

The reality check is stunning. How to ignore the alarming pervasive trend towards democratic backsliding in the “western Balkans”? How to overlook the establishment of illiberal regimes in Hungary and Poland? How to disregard, almost everywhere in Europe, the rise of aggressive right-wing populism and far-right nationalist parties advocating an exclusionary and monolithic conception of what it means to belong to a given “people” (*Volk*)?

Election results show populists’ progress in almost all EU countries. Looking at presidential elections: in 2006 in Bulgaria: 21.5%; in 2010 in Austria: 20.5%; and in 2017 in France: 33.9%. Concerning legislative elections: in 2005 in Poland: 19.4%; in 2007 in Denmark: 13.7% and in Finland: 14.1%; in 2010 in the Netherlands: 10.1%; in 2012 in Romania: 13.8%; in 2017 in Austria: 26%, in Czech Republic: 40.4% and in Germany: 12.6%; in 2018 in Italy: 37% and in Hungary: 49.3%.

Beyond the figures, Europe today is home to intolerance, chauvinism and xenophobia; and, more so, to open, unrestrained hate speech. Considering the case of central and eastern Europe, not foreign immigrants, but national minorities, seen as protected by “Brussels”, are targeted – such as Roma in Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria; Hungarians in Romania; and Turks in Bulgaria. Indeed, the recent refugee influx represents a population

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100 Zielonka *Counter-Revolution*, p. 10.
104 See Jan-Werner Müller’s conceptual analysis of populism as the “shadow” of democracy: Jan-Werner Müller *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia: Pen Press, 2016).
105 See Alexandra Nacu “L’émergence de la « question rom » en Roumanie et en Bulgarie”, *Tumultes* (2009) 32-33, pp. 191-216. We may mention that, while 100,000 Jewish Hungarians are stigmatised, ethnic Hungarians living abroad (among them 1.4 million in Romania and 530,000 in Slovakia) are not perceived as “foreigners”; they may even easily acquire dual citizenship and benefit, from 28 December 2017, from a budget of EUR 448.7m.
increase of only 0.2 per cent in the EU – compared to more than 10 per cent in Jordan and 25 per cent in Lebanon.  

Totem and no Taboo. Populism is infallibilist. Impressively, those active in these movements are sure of themselves, they have no doubts. Meanwhile, those standing for democracy, liberal consensus and a more integrated Europe – core values meanwhile transformed into weaknesses – are plagued by questions and doubts as never before. Quibbling about the ups and downs of the EU, facing the current “EU crisis”, some insist on going ahead with an integration strategy that has become, in the meantime, obsolete; while others consider Europe’s fragility or even a possible EU disintegration process.

Seemingly, right-wing anti-integration populists have succeeded in imposing their viewpoint consisting of a presentation of the EU as an agency of foreign rule against which the nation-state must defend itself. Or perhaps this might be a left-wing critique of integration. Against the background of an analysis of the changing relationship between capitalism and democracy, and the proliferation of post-democracy tendencies, i.e. the Union’s “democratic deficit”, Wolfgang Streeck commits to the renationalisation of economic and monetary policies as well as for the revival of the nation-state. Albeit successful in different circles that might hardly agree on common strategies, these political narratives – framed only in national terms – are unable to break the locks of the trap.

This kind of “methodological nationalism” relies on a one-dimensional understanding of relations between the nation-state and the supranational (“the neoliberal-supranational Leviathan”), disregarding other levels. More fundamentally, both the above-mentioned, albeit diverse, narratives are framed in the terms of a domination paradigm. All other possible discourses, of European integration, of the principles of solidarity and cosmopolitanism, are thus marginalised by an epistemology intended to police “deviations”. What matters instead is, in Donna Haraway’s words, to “craft a poetic/political unity without relying on a logic of appropriation, incorporation and taxonomic identification.”

Donna Haraway’s subtle Manifesto for Cyborgs, developed in another context, is correctly placed here as the cyborg simulates politics, paving the way to a much more potent field of operations. Her sound critique reads as follows:

The theoretical and practical struggle against unity-through-domination or unity-through-incorporation ironically not only undermines the justifications for patriarchy, colonialism, humanism, positivism, essentialism, scientism and other unalmented -isms, but all claims for an organic or natural standpoint. I think that radical and socialist/Marxist feminisms have also undermined their/our own epistemological

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107 See Carolin Emcke *Gegen den Hass* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2016).
108 Of course, when discussing the multiple resistances and oppositions to the various federalist approaches to Europe, a detailed analysis should consider herein the long-term perspective of history. The term “eurosceptic” was introduced in 1985 and the recent wave of criticism of the EU started in the 1990s, but the first waves of criticism trace back to the 1900–1950s. See Brunetelau, *Combattre l’Europe*, 2018.
strategies and that this is a crucially valuable step in imagining possible unities. It remains to be seen whether all “epistemologies” as Western political people have known them fail us in the task to build effective affinities.\textsuperscript{113}

Our final section attempts to scrutinise how this viewpoint may enable to unlock the trap.

Manifold are the visions, prospects and calls discussed in innumerable working papers, op-eds and academic publications. Nevertheless, the question: “What is to be done?” must not undermine a more crucial one: “Is there anyone to do it?” This is precisely the starting point of Offe’s thoughts on entrapped Europe:

The observation is that the crisis has largely paralyzed or silenced the forces and sources of constructive remedial agency, which are capable of implementing strategies and changes by which the crisis might eventually be overcome and its repetition precluded. Contrary to what is claimed by Marxian analysts and also self-confident technocrats, the crisis does not breed but rather paralyzes the very forces that might be capable of overcoming it; it disables agency rather than activating dynamics of learning and the capacity for resilience. The present crisis has deactivated potential crisis managers and agents of change.\textsuperscript{114}

Attempting to answer his question “who might liberate Europeans from the trap”, Offe reviews the potential of various agents: the Union’s citizens; EU agencies; social and political forces; or the benevolent leadership of one country (Germany) or a small group of them. Their respective capacity for agency looks bleak:

Taken together, the above brief (yet complete, I believe) list of arguments “for” the EU and its further (democratic) integration is not sufficiently powerful in its political appeal to allow us to predict a sustained and robust alliance of popular political forces, preferences, and political parties to be inspired by any mix of them. For the EU also has its intensely and widely perceived flaws, which are highlighted and put into sharp relief by the crisis itself.

[...]

The overall picture indicates that political dispositions for action concerning the Euro zone and the further course of European integration are highly fragmented and deeply divided along the left/right, national/supranational and creditor/debtor country axes. The result is a pervasive paralysis of agency.\textsuperscript{115}

The only light at the end of this tunnel is Offe’s hope that concrete policies in the field of social policies may mobilise “a kind of agency capable of carrying out viable responses to the crisis.”\textsuperscript{116} As pertinent as this might be, it is quite “thin” when rethinking that it is the Union’s integration process that is at stake. The “trap” metaphor suggests there might be no way out of the labyrinth, but the next section follows Zygmunt Bauman’s advice to view Europe as \textit{An Unfinished Adventure}.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{113} Haraway “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” (1985), p. 16.
\textsuperscript{114} Offe \textit{Europe Entrapped}, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{115} Offe \textit{Europe Entrapped}, respectively: p. 76 and p. 89.
\textsuperscript{116} Offe \textit{Europe Entrapped}, p. 121.
3. Awaking and Facing a multiplex Europe

For us, who owe it to a revolution and the resulting foundation of an entirely new body politic that we can walk in dignity and act in freedom, it would be wise to remember what a revolution means in the life of nations. Whether it ends in success, with the constitution of a public space for freedom, or in disaster, for those who have risked it or participated in it against their inclination and expectation, the meaning of revolution is the actualisation of one of the greatest and most elementary human potentialities, the unequaled experience of being free to make a new beginning, from which comes the pride of having opened the world to a Novus Ordo Saeclorum.


Pursuing the chosen sequencing approach, the end of the EU dream should be logically followed by “awaking” – a key concept of Walter Benjamin’s dialectical dream theory. Transposing the Freudian dream understanding from the individual subject to the collective, Benjamin views the “awaking” dialectically as a synthesis of “dream consciousness” and “waking consciousness”: “Then the moment of awakening would be identical with the ‘now of knowability’ in which things put on their true – Surrealist – face”.

Benjamin’s approach was an analytical attempt to awaken from the nightmare of fascism. Nowadays, the EU finds itself in the middle of the ford: while the EU dream is over and the post-crisis future belongs to the “not yet” (Ernst Bloch), the Union experiences the very moment of collective awakening.

Our previous sections highlighted on the one hand, Union’s multilevel heterogeneity and the thus growing differentiated integration, and, on the other hand, the omnipresence of the “methodological nationalism” and the difficulty to think beyond. Admitted, Michel Vauchez’ “methodological Europeanism” approach attempts to reframe the European project through the acquis. Very unfortunately, he doesn’t really depart from the nation-state narrative. The present section starts with a short introductory note on “Europe”. It then provides an overview of some key aspects of regionalism in Europe, focusing on South East Europe. Accordingly, a new narrative of the Europeanisation process is proposed. The conclusion attempts to frame a new understanding of a “multiplex Europe” in a new geopolitical environment.


119 See Jamie Owen Daniel & Tom Moylan (Eds.), *Not Yet. Reconsidering Ernst Bloch* (London: Verso, 1997).

3.1. De-borderisation of Europe

What most cannot stand nor really apprehend is the very fact that Europe isn’t define nor by its geographic nor by its historical borders – Europe is indeed a notion with vague territorial boundaries and changing historical borders. As Edgar Morin recalls, “Europe” as a concept defies precise definition in terms of space and time:

Europe is an uncertain notion, born of confusion, with vague borders, a shifting geometry, and subject to slippage, breaks and metamorphoses. What is therefore needed is to probe the idea of Europe precisely where it is uncertain, blurred, and contradictory so as to reveal its complex identity.121

Morin goes on considering Europe as a never accomplished project characterized by its metamorphoses – a concept that implies both continuity and transformation:

Modern Europe appeared by metamorphosis, like a winged insect emerging from its chrysalis and taking flight out into the world. [...] Modern Europe is the product of a metamorphosis, and it has continued to live by metamorphoses: from a Europe of states to a Europe of nation-states; from a balance-of-powers Europe to a Europe of chaos and violence; from a trading Europe to an industrial Europe; from an apogean Europe to an abyssal Europe; from a Europe mistress of all the world to a province Europe under guardianship. Thus, Europe’s identity is to be defined not despite its metamorphoses, but in its metamorphoses. This metamorphic identity subsists in the accelerating change that, in a unique and prodigious way, characterizes European history from the fifteenth to the twentieth century, a time Europe experienced as a devastating cyclone. Modern Europe has never lived except in motion. Its being has never been other than as accelerated change.122

Once characterised by limitlessness, the European project was then perceived as a successful model for the global world,123 Europe faces nowadays the limits of its identity in a new geopolitical context. In the late 1980s, Morin was among the very few ones who predicted the twenty-first century would not belong to Europe – envisioning that Europe was not anymore the center of the world and would instead become a sort of periphery. Against the current geopolitical background, Europe must think itself both as periphery and as “meta-nation” – instead of a misfortune, it may well represents its lifeline.124

Today, we may reframe Morin’s narrative saying the EU is increasingly facing multi-dimensionality and fluidity – multi-actor, multi-level and multi-scalar processes, forming a complex geometry of interlocking networks. As pinpointed by Janine Wedel, we live in a world of flexibility:

The new players and networks of power and influence do not restrict themselves to activities in any one arena. Rather, through their activities, they connect state with private, bureaucracy with market, political with economic, macro with micro, and global with national, all the while making public decisions — decisions backed by the power of the state.125

Accordingly, the European integration process must take into account the “flex nets” and “network power”.

123 Among many symptomatic cases we may mention here Mark Leonard, Why Europe Will Run the 21st Century (London: Fourth Estate, 2005).
This issue is crucial for the Union if it wants to gain relevance, and even more so for South East European (SEE) states as they may play a key role in a pan-European framework given their geo-strategic position – bridging the Danube region, Central and Eastern Europe, Western Asia and the Russian Federation. What should be borne in mind is that South East Europe is a “region of overlapping regions”\(^{126}\). Indeed, SEE is not a homogeneous region but rather a multi-faceted network linked to other networks of regions. This is best exemplified by the regional cooperation schemes which are evolving inside but also outside the EU in the direction of an interpenetration between the interior and exterior of states, virtually producing a “de-borderisation”\(^{127}\) as well as, at the same time, a “nostalgia for roots and walls”\(^{128}\) – as illustrated by 5 out of 15 EU transnational cooperation programmes (Interreg, Strand B) targeting South East Europe (see Map 3). Of course, regional cooperation initiatives show cultural, contextual, and time sensitivities. They evolve, change, adjust, develop, and sometimes even disappear. Earlier, old, new and comparative regionalisms represent a way to capture the fluidity and history of regions (see Table 3)\(^{129}\).

Map 3: Transnational cooperation programmes involving SEE (Strand B – 2014–2020)

Source: InfoRegio.


\(^{129}\) See our review of various regional programmes and initiatives in Solioz, *Thinking the Balkans Out of the Box*. 
Only a flexible architecture and strategy may overcome what could be viewed as new dividing lines between EU member states encompassing the latest enlargement, “would-be” (thus, South East European) EU members and those countries which are explicitly precluded from EU accession – such as Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the Caucasian states. New strategic thinking is also needed in order to be able to cope with the greater complexity resulting from, first, the relations among South East European countries (sub-regional cooperation and multiple bilateral issues) and their respective partnership with the EU; and, second, the coexistence of numerous programmes – such as the pre-accession process, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the strategic partnership with the Russian Federation, numerous bilateral agreements, various action plans and the wide range of EU and Council of Europe cross-border, transitional and inter-regional programmes.

Map 4: Europe of variety

Beyond there mere EU, both the European integration and the regional cooperation processes require thus flexibility. Given that too often regions are not on the radar, let’s list the main territorial configurations and institutional frameworks shaping regional cooperation in Europe: the Council of Europe (CoE), the European Union (EU), the Schengen area, the Eurozone, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the European Economic Area (EEA), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), the Energy Community, and the UNECE.

Map 4 captures part of this: it gives an idea of a Europe as a complex multi-layered structure involving different types of partly overlapping integration and territorial cooperation schemes of varying depths and degrees of institutionalisation. Europe is thus already today a multilevel and multi-floor Europe with plurilateral governance and multispeed arrangements.130

3.2. Multiple and hybrid membership

Despite the rhetoric and the many conferences with their (self-) reassuring statements and promises, accession prospects seem unambiguously bleak for South East European countries. The enthusiasm and political will have evaporated, and, most crucially, the EU policy and strategies have failed to acknowledge the emerging new world order.

But really has nothing changed in the last two decades? On the one hand, no: Slovenia (May 2004) and Croatia (July 2013) have become full-fledged EU member states. But on the other, yes: the other SEE countries remain in the EU’s waiting room.

Resistances to rethinking and renewing European strategies for South East Europe can be traced back to the first EU–Western Balkans Summit, held in November 2000 in Zagreb. After the second EU–Western Balkans Summit organised in the framework of the Thessaloniki European Council (June 2003), the Center for Applied Policy Research (CAP) identified that progress regarding South East Europe had reached a stumbling block and called therefore for a “determined rethinking and a renewal of European strategies for South Eastern Europe”.131 In the meantime, 18 years after, almost no significant move forward on any radar.

Would it be possible to further completing the European integration through a pan-European and also regional-based process? If so, we might say: South Easts Europe integration is already at work.

The focus lies here on two intertwined processes: the European – thus not only EU-related – integration and the multiple regional cooperation networks in their relation to SEE. Obviously, the nexus between both is as complex as it is manifold. It is thus crucial to envision a framework that encompasses the multi-layered structure of regional co-operation and the European integration.

130 See Fritz W. Scharpf, Community and Diversity. Institutions, Policies and Legitimacy in Multilevel Europe (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 2010).
Such a pan-European vision sets the bilateral and multilateral issues, as well as regional integration and cooperation, in a coherent and significant framework for an efficient development of economic, political and cultural cooperation. Additionally, a pan-regional approach such as this represents a bold vision for South East Europe, and also for Europe as a whole. Fredrik Söderbaum recalls the main features of pan-regional movements:

Pan-regional movements were usually motivated by a mixture of geopolitical, socio-economic, cultural (sometimes even racial) and, to some extent, functional beliefs and goals. They were multidimensional and reflected shared ideas and goals of political and intersocietal unity rather than intergovernmental regionalism in a more narrow sense.

It would be a mistake to think “early regionalism” is outdated. Today’s Organisation of American States (OAS) can be traced back to the 1889–90 regional cooperation in the Americas. It is the oldest still working organisation of this kind in the world. Thus, albeit rebranded, pan-regional movements may become relevant in the new world order.

Furthermore, while in South East Europe, “integration” is almost exclusively related to the European Union accession process, the term ought instead to be understood in a much broader sense. What is at stake is to frame a process that establishes, confirms and deepens the sense of belonging to Europe independently of being EU member state. Here “territorial cooperation”, intended as partnerships established between the regional or local authorities of one state and the equivalent authorities in one or more other states, plays a key role in the perspective of a qualitative integration strategy.

While the current accession process amounts to an “anticipatory Europeanisation”, such an alternative approach envisions an effective multiplex Europeanisation process – again, in no way limited to the EU. Adding new, already existing layers, would nevertheless both deepens and opens the Union’s organisation – already characterised by “unity in diversity”, positive and progressive divergences, and increased heterogeneity. Noteworthy, progressive divergences, often source of problems, may also contribute to a more convergence European political space, insofar as it could help to “manage” European diversity.

While the distinction between façade and substantial membership is now blurred, non-member states or regions may receive an “upgrade”. Indeed, various “not yet EU members” are already increasingly applying EU laws and regulation – thus, virtually, they are “in”. In opposite way, the global crisis stirred distorted or even “façade” Europeanisation, with some EU member countries exhibiting a low-profile democrationisation and have, virtually, to consider a “re-entry” process. Indeed, some full-fledged Union’s member states as Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Cyprus experienced between 2010 and 2012 conditionality policies similarly to “may be members” from south East Europe. In Attila Ágh’s words:

In general, the declining NMS democracies feature weak party systems, fragile governments and increasing oligarchisation and corruption in polity terms. They have not yet achieved high-performing democracies in policy terms or effective EU membership in politics terms – in other words, they have not achieved genuine Europeanisation.

As the inside/outside divide is blurred, multiple and flexible membership/partnership should be considered. A viewpoint developed by Jan Zielonka who views the Union not as a

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132 See Solioz, *Thinking the Balkans Out of the Box*, chapter 2.3.
134 Ágh, “The increasing core-periphery divide and members states”, p. 123.
Westphalian super-state, but as a neo-medieval empire characterised by overlapping authorities, divided sovereignty, diversified institutional arrangements and multiple identities. Inspired by David Mitrany’s studies from the 1940s to the 18970s, Zielonka’s original and iconoclastic analysis, often perceived as a narrative of European disintegration, may well be understood as a thought-provoking book envisioning a “soft integration” process. Accordingly,

Nor does new medievalism mean the death of European nation states; rather it implies further transformation of these states and the increased importance of other polities, be they large cities or regions. NGOs will also grow in importance, some of them defending certain values such as environmental or minority rights, while others will represent corporate or consumer interests. The result will be a multiplication of various hybrid institutional arrangements, and increased plurality of political allegiances.

Such a polycentric approach supports the integration of interdependent and transnational polities: effective, more functional than merely territorial integration are to be carried out by multiple actors and networks – and thus not just by states.

Europe’s increased diversity and heterogeneity requires a new approach of the international and transnational reality that represents indeed a break with the classical modern conception of political territoriality as Denis Retaillé highlights:

Before, the coalescence of societies used to be handled in a simple way by contiguity. […] Now what one has to invent is the coalescence of different levels of society. Something that resembles horizontal federalism, i.e. the process of assembling incomplete or unfinished societies in places that are imperfect, a little elusive, and with variable dimensions.

To sum up, while nation, state and territory still exist, new — subnational or transnational — political actors emerges — Delors’ vision of Europe as an “unidentified object” become reality. Among these emergent political networks, regions play a decisive, albeit often neglected role.

The New Regionalism Approach (NRA) c developed from the mid-1980s on, notably by the seminal work of Björn Hettne and Fredrik Söderbaum – offers an adapted conceptual framework in its advocacy of a multi-layered and comprehensive understanding of regionalism, which is not bound to the Westphalian state-centred approach. The NRA, further developed in the framework of the “comparative regionalism”, highlights a multi-dimensional and pluralistic type of regionalism, as well as new institution designs and the active role of non-state actors.

Additionally, we have to consider that many regional cooperation initiatives involve at the state level countries (or regions belonging to states) that are not yet EU member-states and are also non-EU countries. Accordingly, regional cooperation programmes had been developed from the mid-2000s on in the respective frameworks of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (2006) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (2007). Regional cooperation thus developed specific programmes treating in a different way both “internal borders” – separating adjoining territories of (forthcoming) member states – and “external borders” –

delimiting member states from non-EU countries. The former anticipate and accompany the accession process of incoming EU member-states, while the latter play a substantial role in “managing” the new “East–West” divide.

Table 3: Old, new and comparative regionalism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Old regionalism</th>
<th>New regionalism</th>
<th>Comparative regionalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
<td>Post–World War II and Cold War (Europe)</td>
<td>Post–Cold War</td>
<td>Multipolar and multiplex world order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bipolarity but also post-colonialism provided context (developing world)</td>
<td>Globalization and neoliberalism</td>
<td>War on terror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Linkage</strong></td>
<td>Regional integration beyond the nation-state (Europe)</td>
<td>Regionalism seen as resisting, taming or advancing economic globalization</td>
<td>Regional governance part of multi-layered global governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development and nation-building (developing world)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sectors</strong></td>
<td>Sector specific</td>
<td>Multi-sectorial or specialized</td>
<td>State and non-state actors grouped in formal and informal forms of organization in growing number of sectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actors</strong></td>
<td>Formal and states-led regionalism through regional organizations</td>
<td>State vs. non-state actors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Forms</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Regionalism vs. regionalization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epistemology</strong></td>
<td>Dominance of positivism, rationalism and materialism</td>
<td>Rationalism vs. constructivism</td>
<td>Epistemological pluralism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Emerging dialogues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methodology</strong></td>
<td>Europe-focused Rigid comparison</td>
<td>Regional specialisation vs. false universalism</td>
<td>Increasing comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Emergence of non-Eurocentric comparative regionalism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Nothing is really new here. Since its early stages, regional cooperation and integration had been largely related to reconstruction and reconciliation as illustrated by the following milestones that belong to the “old regionalism” era (see Table 3): the creation of the European

The key element in the next stage – which corresponds to the “new regionalism” phase initiated by the White Paper on internal markets (1985), the Single European Act (1986), and the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) – was the EU’s regional policy reform in 1998: the European commission assigned a key role to regional, more specifically to cross-border, cooperation in the task of European integration. Accordingly, the community initiative Interreg was introduced in 1990 and became instrumental both in economic growth and territorial cohesion.138

After the 2007 Treaty of Lisbon, territorial cohesion became a strategic goal of EU regional policy, and regional cooperation became an integral part of EU integration policy. Thus, integration also becomes effective in the framework of the comprehensive territorial cooperation policy that encompasses a set of three strands or schemes: first, Cross-border cooperation (local cooperation between neighbouring regions separated by a frontier); second, Transnational cooperation (cooperation over large areas); and, third, inter-regional cooperation (pan-European networked cooperation).

Obviously, the geopolitical upheaval in 1989 intensified and deepened the linkage between integration and regional cooperation. Euroregions, created in the early 1990s, spanned and linked East and West territories, contributing notably to speeding up the path of Central and Eastern European countries towards accession. Meanwhile, the regional cooperation schemes also play a security role in “Wider Europe”. In the view of then President of the European commission Romano Prodi, they constitute “a ring of friends surrounding the union”.139 They are thus tools for a “soft power” management of EU’s external borders. In the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), they were supposed to replace the Cold War order, ensuring democratic stability on the EU periphery. Nowadays, of course, in a very different geopolitical context, the ENP is taking on new dimensions.140

The focus on the above-mentioned linkage must nevertheless not over-shadow the main differences. While the interstate level and bilateral relations matter in the framework of European integration, for the most part local and regional stakeholders are involved in regional cooperation. Of course, their respective goals have a different magnitude: compare the “ever closer union among the peoples of Europe” (Schuman Declaration, 1950) with the practical solutions to border problems. Accordingly, the tools vary: unique Community law versus different national legal frameworks. Finally, both are evolving in a different way: while strengthening of the institutions and spatial expansion are the hallmarks of EU integration, singularity and diversity characterise regional cooperation. And last but not least, they have quite a diverse visibility: respectively high versus low.

138 See Solioz, Thinking the Balkans Out of the Box, chapter 2.1.


140 See the volume edited by Sieglinde Gstöhl, The European Neighbourhood Policy in a Comparative Perspective (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).
3.3. Theoretical framework

Methodologically speaking, I refer to three distinct and heterogeneous, yet nonetheless interconnected, areas — in which I have been active over the last thirty years. These draw on: first, a narrative corpus (administrative documents, review reports, non-papers); second, forums of discussion (seminars, conferences, etc.) and, third, publication networks (thematic reviews, Internet forums, informal networks). By comparing the dynamism, flexibility and interconnectivity between the above-mentioned areas in the fields, on the one hand, of architecture and urbanism and, on the other hand, of integration and regionalism, we may observe that the latter are less permeable and flexible, specifically in SEE. For the former, meanwhile, plasticity and porosity characterise these areas, along with the consented flow of information, projects, practitioners and scholars, with the same persons being subsequently or simultaneously active in various areas.141

For the French urbanist Ascher, this corresponds to a global trend, a new phase of society that he identifies as the “hypertext society”: After the classical, community-based society and the industrial, Fordist-Keynesian-based society, the hypertext society characterises a third revolution (see Table 4). The hypertext metaphor reflects a layered organisation of society, an n-dimensional space, where people belong simultaneously to different layers and shift with ever greater ease from one to another. Indeed, people belong simultaneously to different layers of society, and shift more and more readily from one to another. Nowadays, social links might weaken, but they are considerably enhanced: social relations, which are indeed more fragile, are more numerous and more subject to change.142

Flexibility is thus a key argument in “neo urbanism” as conceptualized by Ascher.143 Accordingly, the process of standardisation shifts, in the “neo urbanism” approach, from being a means of mass-production and spatial expansion (as conceived in the framework of a neoliberal functional, bureaucratic and static approach), to being a means of change and combination. Flexible and highly reactive projects, involving a wide range of “drivers for change” constantly involved in reflexion and negotiation, increase joint ownership, reinvigorate local democracy, foster “commutative solidarity” — in that they relate people and organisations that belong to a multiplicity of interconnected networks — and, last but not least, open new ways of thinking politics.

A closer look at Ascher’s approach highpoints similarities structuring neo-urbanism and comparative regionalism: both can be defined as open, multidimensional and collaborative systems; for both, the changing world order context matters. Ascher’s emphasised social mutations imply significant changes in the conception, production and administration of territories. The same applies to regionalism. As Björn Hettne put it: “A new world order thus implies a new type of regionalism”.144 Furthermore, Ascher’s distinction between community, industrial and hypertext society (see Table 4) fits for the most part with the distinction

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141 As for urbanism, an excellent insight is provided by Alain Bourdin and Joël Idt (Eds.), L’urbanisme des modèles (La Tour d’Aigues: Editions de l’Aube, 2016).


143 Ascher, instead of using the concept of “new urbanism”, introduced the concept of “neo-urbanism”. As for the discussion of the ten new principles of urbanism, see Ascher, Les nouveaux principes de l’urbanisme, pp. 95–120.

between four subsequent phases in the development of regionalism: early, old, new and comparative regionalism.

Table 4: Modernisation process and the three modern revolutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Industrial society</th>
<th>Hypertext society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social ties</td>
<td>few</td>
<td>more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>not diversified</td>
<td>diversified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stable</td>
<td>scalable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>becoming specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td>mechanic</td>
<td>organic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social territory</td>
<td>autarkic</td>
<td>integrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>close</td>
<td>national-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>locally driven</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paradigm</td>
<td>belief</td>
<td>universal reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tradition</td>
<td>functionality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>destiny</td>
<td>representative democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>authority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>repetitive</td>
<td>rational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulation</td>
<td>custom</td>
<td>state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>chief</td>
<td>laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>agriculture</td>
<td>industrial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>local</td>
<td>socio-professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanism</td>
<td>town</td>
<td>industrial city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>parish</td>
<td>central administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>canton</td>
<td>welfare state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nation-state</td>
<td>alliances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>treaties</td>
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</tbody>
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Following Fredrik Södernaum’s synthesis, Table 3 traces the intellectual roots and main characteristics of three types of regionalism: on the one hand, outlining the context and polity content (links between national, regional and global governance; and sectors, actors and forms of organisation) and, on the other hand, focusing on the modes of knowledge production and
methodology. This framework, insisting on the influence of the political context and of different theoretical standpoints, should be handled in a smooth way. First, the various phases are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Thus, whenever possible, they should be interconnected. For example:

The inclusion of the section on early regionalism serves to draw attention to the deep roots of and diverse trajectories of regionalism preceding the era of old regionalism. Among other things, early regionalism underlines the interaction rather than the competition between regionalist and statist ideas, and at least in some respects this resembles more recent debates about multilayered global governance.

Second, the same complementary approach should apply to the richness of theorizing regionalism. There are of course many ways to consider regions and regionalism. Considering various theories is indispensable as they provide a useful toolbox for a critical analysis of different regional schemes and are instrumental in overcoming the binary conceptualizations (state versus non-state actors, formal versus informal regionalisms, etc.). Often their differences refer to different aspects of regionalism, as Söderbaum has highlighted:

For instance, structural analysis may be more plausible when the research focus is put on the role of regions in world-order transformation, whereas, a stronger emphasis on agency is necessary for a better explanation of agencies and micro-processes on the ground.

Considering the emerging regional architecture of world politics, Amitav Acharya provides another interesting illustration of complementarity in the framework of the discussion on how regions respond to powers in the new world order. Acharya calls for balancing the top-down and powercentric analytical prism [...] with an agency-oriented perspective that acknowledges local resistance to, and socialization of, powerful actors and attests to the endogenous construction of regions.

3.4. Rethinking the New World Order

We are already living in a new world order, facing a fresh Copernican revolution: we now live in a less USA- and Euro-centred global system, and more in a multipolar world with enhanced mobility, diverse political cultures, higher heterogeneity and porous boundaries. Forthcoming major economic trends give an idea of the global turn. The 2012 published OECD report *Looking to 2060* highlights major changes in the relative size of world economies:

- Growth of the non-OECD G20 countries will continue to outpace OECD countries
- Fast growth in China and India will make their combined GDP measured at 2005 Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs), soon surpass that of the G7 economies and exceed that of the entire current OECD membership by 2060.

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147 Söderbaum, *Ibidem*. In the same book, Chapter 3 “Learning from Theory” reviews the main theories and competing approaches to regionalism (pp. 36–61).
The faster growth rates of China and India imply that their combined GDP will exceed that of the major seven (G7) OECD economies by around 2025 and by 2060 it will be more than 1.5 times larger, whereas in 2010 China and India accounted for less than one half of G7 GDP.150

Goldman Sachs and World Bank reports predict similar results, notably that in the coming years, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) economies will surpass the USA and the G-6.151 The long run of the West’s material and ideological hegemony appears to be coming to an end. The fading away of the old world order and the emergence of a new one makes these “single visions” obsolete. We face, Donna Haraway notes, a “profusion of spaces and identities, and the permeability of boundaries in the personal body and in the body politic”.152

As for the latter, “the biggest, most basic questions of world politics are now open for debate”.153 Even more so, we are additionally confronted with a multiplicity of narratives and new players: China on the rise, Russia recovering, India and Brazil, and others, emerging. Strikingly, this applies also to non-state actors – Viva Rio from Brazil and Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC) based in Bangladesh (to name but a few) already compete with Bill Gates, Richard Branson, CARE and Médecins sans frontières. This implies a diversity of purposes as well as a different distribution of power — meanwhile empirical studies in regionalism are confirming the power shift from North to South and West to East.154 As Peter Katzenstein says: “global politics will be polycentric, and plural in substance”.155

Accordingly, it would be out-dated to reload the nineteenth-century multi-polar world version. Multilateralism – often only a way to legitimate unilateral decisions – is passé and might well be reframed as “regional multilateralism”. As for unipolarity and hegemony, they don’t ring true anymore, but heterogeneity does. According to Charles Kupchan, the consequence is that:

liberal democrats will have to share the stage with leaders of quite different stripes. Autocrats, theocrats, strongmen, and populists will all play a role in ensuring that liberal democracy is only one of the multiple variants of political order that will populate the next international system.156

In the Middle East, Africa and Latin America – regions long dominated by outside (colonial) power – the legacy of top-down rule still impacts politics, and religion and ethnicity still and always provide the strongest political base. In the Middle East and in Africa, few countries might transition to democracy, some in substance, others only in form, but many surely not. Democratic activists and foreign donors are able to challenge neither autocrats in Russia and

156 Kupchan, No One’s World, p. 91.
China, nor theocrats in the Middle East, nor even populists in Latin America and strongman politics in Africa.

Furthermore, heterogeneity is augmented by the fact that democratic countries do not ally with one another as a matter of course, as illustrated by India and Brazil, not to mention Turkey – all of which are countries that do not follow the West’s lead. Each of these countries thus forges its own version of modernity, and many different regime types will coexist. Consequently, this global dissensus elucidates why the leading and emerging powers – with the exception of China – hardly envision, let alone understand, the rules of the new world order. This brings Kupchan to state:

The next world will not march to the Washington Consensus, the Beijing Consensus, or the Brasilia Consensus. It will march to no consensus. Rather, the world is headed toward a global dissensus.

[...]  
What comes next will not be the Chinese century, the Asian century, or anyone else’s century. Rather, no one’s world will exhibit striking diversity; alternative conceptions of domestic and international order will compete and coexist on the global stage. The next world will hardly be the first one in which different great powers operate according to different conceptions of order. But, due to the onset of global interdependence, it will be the first time that such a diverse set of order intensively and continuously interact with each other.157

But it would be misleading to think here only in terms of political power, distribution of power, international power games, etc. The coexistence of a multiple centre of power, of manifold conceptions of modernity, and of diverse fundamental principles structuring the new world order will be key. Thus, the script behind the emerging global landscape matters a great deal.

3.4.1. Visualising the New World Order

Weber and Jentleson suggest repeatedly that “a global competition of ideas [...] within a market place of ideas” characterises the twenty-first-century as a ‘new age of ideology’”.158 But ideology – using Mannheim’s definition159 – is a mode of thought that obscures the real condition of society, thereby stabilizing the shared social reality. Accordingly, we may have some doubts about the relevance of Weber and Jentleson’s viewpoint that may well deliver merely “reproductive imagination”. Paul Ricœur’s approach might help to avoid the trap. Relying on Mannheim’s seminal work, he reconnects ideology and utopia in a single conceptual framework driving toward the development of “productive imagination”.

We only take possession of the creative power of imagination through a relation to such figures of false consciousness ideology and utopia. It is as though we have to call upon the “healthy” function of ideology to cure the madness of utopia and as though the critique of ideologies can only be carried out by a conscience capable of regarding itself from the point of view of “nowhere”.160

Thus, utopia empowers a critique of ideology: ideology provides common values and images, while utopia challenges those common values with new, imaginative alternatives. Ricœur’s philosophy does not consider images, but rather language as the way to access images.

158 Weber and Jentleson, The End of Arrogance, respectively pp. 12, 40, 46, 48, 49, 51, 52, 62 and 195; and, for the new age of ideology: p. 6, 15, 16 and 19.
Language, especially metaphors, produces productive imagination, unfolds new dimensions of reality, and opens the way to the possible, including the anticipation of action. This was a viewpoint formulated initially by Ernst Bloch who also viewed metaphors as the royal road to capture the “not yet conscious”.

Symptomatically, in order to envision the new world order, both François Archer and Amitav Acharya have recourse to a metaphor. They first coined the idea of a “hypertext society”, while the latter introduced the notion of a “multiplex world”. The “multiplex cinema” metaphor stands for a “multiplex world” characterised by the following main features:

⇒ In a multiplex world, the making and management of order is more diversified and decentralized, with the involvement of established and emerging powers, states, global and regional bodies, and transnational non-state actors.

⇒ A multiplex world would be a world of diversity and complexity, a decentered architecture of order management, featuring old and new powers, with a greater role for regional governance.

⇒ A multiplex order is the political order of a culturally diverse world that rests on political and economic interconnectedness, as well as institutional arrangements, relying not on the power or purpose of a single actor or mechanism, but of a range of actors.  

Acharya’s viewpoint, closely related to “new regionalism”, bridges inter-national relations studies and regionalism. The multiplex world order he describes is consistent with the regional worlds approach (regionalism): “Instead of a singular, traditional notion of universality, the idea of regional worlds speaks to a pluralist conception of global order”.  

Acharya concentrates on “the informal, non-hegemonic, comprehensive and multidimensional nature of newly emerging regional interactions and processes”, and on the prospects of progress towards sovereignty-freeing regionalism. More specifically, he highlights, first, that region-building is not dominated by a single power and, second, that emerging powers — in the past branded as the “Third World”, or the “South” – get successfully involved in regional multilateral institutions adapted to their own specific goals and identities.

Accordingly, Acharya suggests rethinking regionalism. Against the background of the new global context, regionalism might potentially deliver a relevant “world order concept”. Various scholars might confirm this possibly. In his seminal work published in 1994, Björn Hettne reflected on the linkage between regionalism and context, as well as on the script of a post-hegemonic world. Hettne considers three scenarios: the first, interdependence based on multilateralism; the second, a USA-, EU- and Japan-based trilateralism; and, the third, a regionalisation of the world – the region emerging as an actor and spokesperson for the constituent states. Even if today we would rule out the two first scenarios, it is worth mentioning that Hettne insisted that: “no scenario has the monopoly on the future”.  

162  Acharya, *The End of American World Order*, p. 82.
In the meantime, various scholars have confirmed that regions have become central to the understanding of world politics. Eve Hepburn re-minds us that the rise of the regions relates to the European integration that “opened up new possibilities to pursue territorial interests that were once ‘closed’ by the expansion of the nation-state [...]. Regions now operate within a post-sovereign or ‘post-Westphalian’ order in which authority is dispersed”. Regions have thus gained a new political role in federalising and regionalising states. Similar understandings – typically belonging to the “new regionalism approach” – need to be supplemented with perspectives such as “regional worlds” ideas, interregionalism and “comparative regionalism” which consider regionalism in the framework of a comparativist perspective encompassing region-building in other areas. Regionalism beyond EU-centrism is a must-approach.

Accordingly, Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver suggest that, “it is now possible to begin more systematically to conceptualise a global world order of strong regions”. Based on detailed studies, Peter J. Katzenstein argues that open and porous regions have become central to contemporary world politics and suggests that they may also provide solutions to the contradictions between states and markets, security and insecurity, nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Viewing regionalism as a driving force of world politics and as a dominating trend in today’s International Relations studies, Rick Fawn finds that “regions are now everywhere across the globe and are increasingly fundamental to the functioning of all aspects of world affairs from trade to conflict management, and can even be said to now constitute world order”.

Rethinking regionalism in a constructivist and reflectivist way, Söderbaum, the authoritative writer on regionalism, states: “regionalism has become a structural component of global politics, deepening and expanding into an increasing number of policy fields”. Applying the institutional design theory to the analysis of comparative regionalism, Acharya and Johnston consider regional institutions as an increasingly prominent feature of world politics. Notably, “their characteristics and performance vary widely: some are highly legalistic and bureaucratic, while others are informal and flexible. They also differ in terms of inclusiveness, decision-making rules and commitment to the non-interference principle”.

Likewise, intergovernmental organisations and politicians are starting to share this standpoint: viewing regionalism as a dimension or even an alternative to the Great Power concert. For the first, the UN, especially since the 1992 Agenda for Peace, involves regional organisations in its high-level meetings – for instance in the field of security matters. The World Trade

166 Thus region-to-region relations, for example EU and ASEAN. Inter-regionalism often means institutionalised inter-regional relations. See Heiner Hängi, Ralf Roloff and Jürgen Rüland (Eds.), Interregionalism and International Relations (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 3.
168 Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 20 — the italics are the authors’.
172 Acharya and Johnston (eds.), Crafting Cooperation, back-cover text.
Organisation (WTO), for its part, has also acknowledged the necessity of considering the role of regionalism positively – albeit subordinating regionalism to the WTO’s multilateralism. For the latter, we may think of Guy Verhofstadt who, then President of the European Council and Belgian Prime Minister, made public in an open letter the idea of replacing the current “G-8 of rich countries […] by a G-8 of existing regional partnerships”. ¹⁷³

But it would be misleading to overemphasise the argument. While taking regionalism seriously, as a “building block of world order”, Acharya introduces a welcome nuanced approach:

Thanks to interregionalism, the rise of alternative non-European forms of regionalism, and the proliferation of transnational issues that regional groups must contend with, regionalism has become more open, inclusive, and multidimensional. While regionalism alone is not a sufficient basis for constructing global order, it cannot be ignored in any meaningful discussion of the future of world politics and deserves serious attention in any discussion of what might take the place of the American World Order.¹⁷⁴

Acharya illustrates once more the added value of the complementary approach: both/and instead of either/or.

At first glance we might think that this would be an approach shared by the UN. Indeed, Secretary-General Kofi Annan envisioned that, “the United Nations and regional organizations should […] play complementary roles in facing the challenges to peace and security”.¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the UN narrative intends to secure the primacy of the UN and its Charta. The rationale being that the UN agenda would be the only foundation for a rules-based world order. Ramesh Thakur questions whether the UN would be able to shape a new world order: he thinks in terms of proximity and views regionalism as an alternative that might possibly complement traditional multilateralism.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, such a complementary approach might be difficult to formulate in practical terms, too, since the UN- and other multilateral approaches, as well as regional modes of governance, tend to follow different logics.

Avoiding linear thinking, Söderbaum considers that the above-mentioned approaches are still reliant on an abstract hierarchical order (structuring the global, regional and national levels). Significantly, the UN approach fails to understand that the “strengthened regional arrangements get their mandate not only ‘from above’ (from the UN), but also ‘from within’”.¹⁷⁷ Accordingly, Söderbaum attempts to overcome binary thinking (global versus local, global versus regional, multilateralism versus bilateralism), and to formulate a “regional multilateralism”, arguing that:

states and global organizations are being locked progressively into a larger regional and interregional framework, in which “regions” become the increasingly relevant scales and even actors in the global security architecture.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Söderbaum, Rethinking Regionalism, p. 200.
Considering that regional formations, actually for the most part interregional institutions, are still “under construction” – which, incidentally, is an argument mentioned by Söderbaum –, the time may not yet be ripe for regional multilateralism. While we may question whether regionalism would be the next paradigm, we may say that it will certainly play a role in it.

3.4.2. Rethinking regionalism away from “Western Values”?

Despite the EU-centred and -led integration and regional cooperation processes, both the EU and the Council of Europe should have learned lessons from their respective interregional programmes and seen that, in regionalism, “lead” has to be replaced by “participate”, and, in politics “dominance” by “influence”. When compared with region-building elsewhere, notably in Asia, it is clear “that the EU does not hold the monopoly over successful pathways to regionalism and regional order-building”.

Meanwhile, away from “Western values”, many emergent powers have made a different political choice and are delivering an alternative governance message – emphasising, for example, order, sovereignty, non-interference and progress – which is seen as legitimate by their people. They are no longer willing to be “norm-takers”; they want to become “norm-makers”. This shift traces back to the experience, as already mentioned, to the era of “old regionalism”, of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) that imposed norms such as non-intervention and equality of states. More recently, these countries, at some distance from traditional-oriented values, have introduced the progressive norm of “common but differentiated responsibility” as a global climate change strategy. The evolution of the Responsibility to Protect provides an additional example for an open-minded setting.

While their normative framework often reflects domestic political conditions and tradition, Acharya calls for a more updated assessment:

There have been some recent developments indicating that the normative gap between the established and emerging powers over sovereignty and non-intervention may be narrowing. While China and Russia adopt a much more cautious attitude toward such interventions, South Africa and Nigeria have led the way in turning Africa’s staunching non-interventionist stance to one that has allowed a number of collective interventions, including humanitarian interventions. While their dilution of non-intervention should not be overstated, the developing countries, including the emerging powers, are showing signs of being more interested and involved in rule-making, as well as contributing to some of the newer and more progressive norms of world order. The evolution of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is a case in point. It is not well known that many African diplomats and political leaders were not only sympathetic to the R2P idea, but played a role in its development.

Additionally, it is worth mentioning the often-discounted fact that countries from Latin America, Eastern Europe, as well as China and India, are successfully active in many interregional programmes or intergovernmental bodies (like the G-20), as well as in the key international financial institutions of the post-war global economic order.

Eric Helleiner’s 2014 book on international development and the making of the post-war order reframes how most of the scholars viewed Bretton Woods. Based on primary sources such as the transcripts of the Bretton Woods conference, he recalls that thirty-two of the forty-four delegations at Bretton Woods were from what we would now call emerging markets. In

181 The IMF and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (nowadays the World bank) were established at the 1944 Bretton Woods conference.
spite of an obvious asymmetry of power and the fact that they did not form a united front, these countries significantly influenced the outcome of the negotiations.  

China, Japan and India illustrate how many emerging countries may have major stakes in the emerging new world order, and how deeply they are involved in regional and global multilateral structures. Of course, this must overshadow neither their differences – which will of course contribute to increasing the diversity of the emerging world order – nor their conflicts (as is the case at the time of writing between China and India).

The question is, on the one hand, whether these countries, as norm-makers, want to export their own – often, but not exclusively, more traditional and hierarchical-driven – values and institutions, which might limit their influence and ability to shape the new world order. Or, on the other hand, whether, as partners, they are receptive to new ones, and thus be willing to reduce the normative gap and gain influence – as the above-mentioned examples tend to prove.

3.4.3. Learning from Athens

Without doubt, the emerging landscape is as complex as it is fluid, and the time is ripe to introduce a change of civilisation. But how is the on-going transition to be managed peacefully? Some might be sceptical about the capacity of emerging powers to follow the Western path to modernity, others about the West’s ability to work out a consensus with emerging powers on foundational principles and rules.

As mentioned, the post-hegemonic world order, as well as regionalism, introduce, instead of a singular dominance and a centralised model of cooperation, a variety of actors and cross-cutting drivers as well as diverse political cultures and competing conceptions of international order. Consequently, the new world order’s key principles will have to be discussed and negotiated. Multiple versions of modernity and politics will enter into a decisive dialogue that must lead toward greater international cooperation and forge a pluralistic order.

Of course, sharing decision-making power is easier to achieve at regional level than at state-or at global-levels. But this argument does not face up to the fact that these levels are mostly intertwined. Thus, the relationship between subnational, national, regional, interregional and global levels must be reconceptualised. As Fredrik Söderbaum argues:

> with the political and institutional landscape in transformation, there is a need to think in terms of a more complex, multiscalar approach to government and governance, in which the state is reorganized and assumes different functions and where non-state actors also contribute.

Furthermore, since the Westphalian order is passé and global governance is not working, Söderbaum suggests that discerning the pluralism of governance structures, that is, regional and multi-layered governance, may help to avoid the trap between the local and the global.

184 Söderbaum, Rethinking Regionalism, p. 195.
185 Regional governance is conceived “as spheres of authority at regional level of human activity, which amounts to systems of rule – formal or informal, public or private – in which goals are pursued through the exercise of control”. Söderbaum, Rethinking Regionalism, p. 197.
The emergent world order will increasingly involve multiple stakeholders who are eager to have a greater say. Close to François Ascher’s concept of “commutative solidarity”, the common-sense notion of “mutuality”, introduced by Weber and Jentleson, helps us to rethink the subtle process of negotiation, diplomacy and persuasion; the idea being that politicians use their authority and power for shared rather than self-interested concerns. The authors mention some convincing examples, such as Carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) which might well apply to other sensitive issues such as intellectual property-intensive sectors (pharmaceutical and agricultural genetics). As for Weber and Jentleson, the “leadership proposition” consists

In the contribution to shared interests that one makes by distributing the technology widely and in such a way that the knowledge gained in practice from using it in diverse circumstances gets cycled back into the system for the benefit of all. And, of course, in the meaningful contribution to carbon reduction and climate change mitigation that would also benefit everyone.

This is one element of the much-needed toolbox to build convergence, a middle ground between the established and emerging powers. Regionalism additionally offers a set of values and strategies: flexibility, autonomy, openness, inclusiveness and interactivity that fit well to the new landscape.

As diverse as different nations are, dialogue and consensus on fundamental values may be shared. This brings us back to Europe’s root, to ancient Athens and its lesson which has still not been learned. Edmund Husserl’s famous Vienna lecture from 1935 might deliver a welcome reminder here – and the reader should feel free hereafter to replace “Europe” with “new world order”:

We can also see how, starting from this [the transformation of human existence and all its cultural life], a supranationality of a completely new sort could arise. I am referring, of course, to the spiritual shape of Europe. Now it is no longer a conglomeration of different nations influencing one another only through commerce and power struggles. Rather, a new spirit, stemming from philosophy and its particular sciences, a spirit of free critique and norm-giving aimed at infinite tasks, dominates humanity through and through, creating new, infinite ideals.

188 The documenta 14 (2017) had precisely the timely motto “Learning from Athens”.

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