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HAS THE EUROPEAN UNION SUCCEEDED IN ITS PRIMARY MISSION OF SECURING PEACE?

Abstract

Since the first ideas of a federal Europe pursued by the "EU's founding fathers", European integration's primary objective was to secure peace in Europe. This policy was extended after the end of the Cold War through new instruments, namely the enlargement policy and the association process. It helped stabilise the newly democratised Central European states through a policy of conditionality, and financial and technical aid safeguarding the transformation. This policy failed in the case of the Eastern Partnership countries due to the external pressure from Russia, relative lack of interest from the strongest Member States and a high degree of heteronormativity among the EU's neighbours themselves.

Keywords: European integration, EU enlargement, peace, neighbourhood, Russia

Introduction

In the aftermath of the Second World War, military aggression, once a primary method of resolving interstate differences in Europe, was relegated to the margins of history. To be clear: it did not disappear entirely, as proved by the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact countries, the 1974 Cypriot war and the bloodshed in the Balkans following the fall of the Communist rule in the Yugoslavia. Yet it was no longer accepted as a legitimate instrument of foreign policy; neither by international law (Griffiths 2002) nor, following the Helsinki final Act of 1975, by the European states themselves. It was certainly not seen as a viable political alternative in Western Europe, despite centuries of enmity that fuelled British, French or German

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foreign policies in the 19th and early 20th century. A number of competing theories emerged to explain this phenomenon, including the democratic peace theory (Russet 1993), a nuclear peace theory (Waltz 1979) and approaches underlining the crucial role played by American hegemony (Mearsheimer 2010). I would like to point out to the fundamental role played by the European Union and its predecessors; while this approach does not exclude the aforementioned theories, it complements them, offering a perspective on the conceptual and institutional framework behind the EU's actorness in the security sphere. More importantly, this approach takes into account the systematic transformation of the international order that took place after the end of the Cold War. Finally, it is the most forward-looking one: peace, seen as a constituting *raison d'être* of the EU, is under mounting challenges in our Eastern neighbourhood. The assessment of the EU's role in securing peace on the continent is a necessary step in planning the European foreign policy vis-à-vis Ukraine and the Russian threat.

1. European Integration as a Peace Process

The "long European civil war" left the continent in ruin. The Second World War took a death toll reaching 39 million victims in the European Union alone (Kesternich et. al. 2012). Half of the casualties were civilians. 70% of European industrial infrastructure was in shambles, economy collapsed and populations were threatened with hunger (Pilisuk, Rountree 2008: 136). While economic recovery was pressing at the time, the need for a long-term solution to avoid future wars was evident to the political, intellectual and economic elites, as well as to the general public.

Yet even before the end of the Second World War, Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi wrote the Ventotene Manifesto (1941), laying the intellectual foundations for what would become a movement for united Europe. Their diagnosis rested on two pillars: the bankruptcy of the old model based on the anarchical competition between nation-states, leading to military conflicts, economic protectionism and colonialism, and the proposed solution – a European unity, with a supranational authority vested with limited, albeit real powers to overcome the international anarchy (Levi 2007). European integration was aimed at quelling the rivalry in Western Europe, solving the famous German question and ensuring peace. Soon, several popular movements sharing the goal of a united Europe emerged, like the Union of European Federalists and the European Movement International, to name just a few.

These foundations resulted in the institutional framework of uniting Europe, starting with the integration of heavy industry in the Community of Coal and Steel.

The functionalist approach adopted by the founding fathers was based on the strategy of small steps. The immediate goal was to promote growth and prevent arms race and cartelisation by putting the coal and steel industries under common governance. Yet political unity and lasting peace were always a present, if concealed, final aim (Rosamond 2000). Soon, the nuclear industry and the rest of European economies were to follow in the form of the European Economic Community. Historical animosities were quelled, both within the framework of institutional integration and increased policy coherence (starting with the 1970 European Political Cooperation) and through the accompanying reconciliation between nations, like the 1963 Élysée Treaty. Military bonds were honed in the North Atlantic Alliance and, to a lesser degree, the West European Union.

The European integration and its peace-inducing role were abided by two external factors. The United States pursued an overtly pro-integrationist policy, aimed at helping integrate the continent to prevent the return of Franco–German rivalry and increase the burden-sharing in the face of the Cold War (Lundestad 1998). On the other hand, the aggressive posturing of the Soviet Union, acting not only as a geopolitical enemy of the West, but also the ideological antithesis of the liberal democratic and Christian values contributed to the sense of European unity and to the urgency of political decisions. In this sense, the European integration was more than just a process of pooling and sharing economic and political resources in the face of the threat from the USSR and its satellites – it was also conveyed as an instrument of strengthening the internal peace and stability in Western Europe by providing sustainable growth and an ideological alternative to the supposed ''international communism''.

2. Safeguarding the Peace After the Cold War – the Enlargement

The end of the Cold War surprised everyone, not least the Member States of the European Economic Community, busy with their institutional transformation towards a closer union. However, the need to step in to fill the power vacuum created by the fall of the communist governments, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and COMECON, as well as the geopolitical withdrawal of the Soviet Union, was evident. Initially wary, some Member States sought to institutionalise their relationships with the CEE countries outside the EU framework, such as Mitterrand's European Confederation or cooperation within the OSCE framework. However, these institutions lacked the attracting power of the EU and were met with little interest in Central Europe

(Czaputowicz 1998). Instead, a policy of gradual rapprochement was pursued through the so-called Europe Agreements, associating new democracies with the EU. What followed was the opening up of economies, the establishment of permanent political dialogue and clear enlargement conditions, the Copenhagen criteria, encompassing the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for minorities, a functioning market economy and an institutional capacity of effectively taking on the obligations and legal *acquis* of the membership.

In effect, the negotiations and subsequent enlargement had a threefold result:

- it helped to consolidate the democratic transition in Central Europe. This was achieved through the process of Europeanization, defined as "a construction, diffusion and institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, shared beliefs and norms consolidated in the EU policy process" (Radaelli 2003: 30). Europeanization should be viewed as a long-term process, reaching further than just institutional "downloading" of structures. It is rather a substantial change of culture and perceptions, to which candidate countries had been exposed long before the formal accession, both through political dialogue and cooperation and legal harmonisation with the *acquis* (Kamińska 2011). On one level, it introduced a legalistic, gradual and negotiable procedure of resolving political conflicts between states. On the other hand, in the short-term perspective, external European pressure aided the governments in pursuing a policy of reforms and, to a large degree, generated a consensus among the political class on the direction of change. The content of this paradigm change included the strengthening of parliamentary democracy, personal freedoms, decentralisation of the government and safeguarding minority rights – thus helping complete the regime transformation. Following Russet's assertions on democratic peace theory (1993), it is important to highlight that these internal reforms not only resulted in better governance and human rights record, but also had a lasting impact on regional stability and lack of military conflicts;

- it resulted in a period of unprecedented economic growth and convergence with Western Europe, stabilising the situation and preventing potential growth of radical movements. There is significant research pointing out that in times of economic crisis or social discontent, the ruling elites may often divert the frustration into hostility against the "other" (Russet, Barzilai 1992). Relative market stability, constant growth and overall improvement of life conditions have prevented a rise of militant nationalism, preying on real or constructed grievances of national minorities, historical enmities or economic and political competition among the states. Instead, even in the periods of economic downturn, voters reverted to the mainstream opposition parties, providing for manageable democratic transitions;

- it facilitated historical reconciliations between nations; the emergence of Polish–German "Interessengemeinschaft" serves as the best example. Similar to the French-German reconciliation serving as both the underlying reason and the main engine of Western European integration, the rapprochement between Poland and Germany after the end of the Cold War was a prerequisite for a stable Central Europe and one of the main vehicles of enlargement (Koszel 2011; Czachur 2011). The EU integration, strengthening personal exchanges, commerce and historical dialogue, facilitated a rapid erosion of negative historical stereotypes and reduced the margin of manoeuvre of potential nationalist-minded politicians from both sides. In consequence, the Polish–German *Interessengemeinschaft* was not only one of the pillars of the enlargement, but also proved indispensable for the larger peace-building project in Central and Eastern Europe in the shape of the Neighbourhood Policy. However, the legacy of the latter remains unclear.

4. The Failure in the Neighbourhood and the Consequences for Peace

While the outcomes of the EU policies are largely positive, both for the states which had already accessed the EU in 2004 and 2007, as well as the candidate countries from the Balkans, their record in the Eastern Neighbourhood has been much worse. As Boonstra and Shapolava (2010: 9) note, the Eastern Partnership did not "accommodate for their security concerns" and played a rather "ill-defined role". This goes contrary to the basic European interest: EU needs a "ring of friends" and "friends among themselves" in its neighbourhood, providing for peace, stability and sustainable growth, and preventing any negative spillover effects. Otherwise, the EU Member States will face not only the immediate consequences of the crisis, such as waves of refugees, but also the undermining of the regional, post-Cold War order based on the inviolability of the national border and the rejection of war as an instrument of international politics.

Instead of pursuing a clearly defined policy based on the prospects of enlargement, conditionality and local ownership, which in turn is based on the EU's normative and transformative power, the EU EaP strategy was constrained by the reservations of several Member States, treating the Eastern Europe and Caucasus as a zone of Russia's preferential geopolitical interests. This was caused by diverging geopolitical interests of the EU Member States, as well as the negligence on the European part, enabling the creation of a coalition of various interest groups, employing representatives of

energy and finance sectors doing business in Russia to act as its unofficial lobbyists (Gressel 2015). The internal pressure culminated in the form of *Russlandversteher*, a German term for political, business and cultural representatives with a distinct sense of apologetic "understanding" of Russia in its current, autocratic form. As a consequence, the EU was reluctant or unable to fully dedicate sufficient resources to the pursuit of the Neighbourhood Policy truly based on rules and principles defining its external actions, such as peace, security and solidarity.

This resulted in paradoxical situations: in several EaP states, public opinion sought the very benefits associated with the EU's enlargement process: strengthening the efficiency and transparency of the states' institutions, a free market economy, democracy and rule of law. Yet the post-Soviet elites were uninterested in a genuine reform that might undermine their positions in the crony capitalism. Alternatively, put under security pressure (e.g. through frozen conflicts) or tempted with financial benefits from Russia, they pursued a policy of faux engagement, neither wholly abandoning the European ambitions, nor embracing them. In consequence, a "no-man's land" emerged, enabling revisionist states like Russia to gradually undermine the post-Cold War order in Europe and re-establish its full zone of influence.

When the status quo met with opposition from the mass protest movements in Georgia and Ukraine, Russia resorted to military force. Its actions were possible due to the lack of credibility of Western deterrence: after years of relying on the peace dividend to diminish military spending, the EU could not be perceived as projecting sufficient will or ability to defend the international status quo in Europe. Russia, acting as a revisionist power, was able to exploit this weakness and pursue a strategy of gradually intensifying aggression against Georgia and Ukraine, carefully gauging reactions in the major Member States of the Union to its advantage (Wright 2015). While the EU was able to impose significant costs on Russia for the aggression, the reactiveness of the policy induced significant losses in Ukraine, both when it comes to military personnel, internal stability and territorial integrity.

The belief that the EU can shield itself from the conflicts in its neighbourhood is misguided; it ignores the staggering number of refugees from the south or Internally Displaced Persons from Ukraine (Curtis 2014), as well as the systemic repercussions of the erosion of the post-Cold War order in Europe. As Krastev (2014: 79) put it, "Russia's willingness to violate Ukraine's territorial sovereignty is the gravest challenge to the European order in over half a century".

The ultimate goal and the ultimate challenge for the EU's peace mission is to maintain a stable and just international order against the attack of revisionist powers. Should the policy of gradual erosion of the post-Cold War order continue, Russia will follow the path of the reconstruction of its sphere of influence, extending to the Central

European EU Members. The threat against the Baltic States is the most imminent and best reported (Hyndle-Hussein 2015), yet it also extends to other frontline countries: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania. In case of an attack against an EU Member State, not only the Union's mission to secure peace would be undermined, but the stability and security of the whole European integration structures themselves would be questioned. For the EU policy to get back on the right track, the Member States have to rethink the peace foundations of the European integration in a wider context of the neighbourhood.

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