EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN: INTEGRATION PROCESS

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Summary

The integration of contemporary European states in a multi-state polity, the European Union, may be seen as the process of rescuing the states and societies of Europe from the consequences of the loss of the centrality of their continent in an increasingly interdependent world. In that light, the European process is intimately linked to global change as depicted in an evolutionary model of the world system. That also means that Europe's relations with its neighborhood are affected by the integration process.

In particular, the invariably tense relations between Europe and the Mediterranean countries have become the object of new strategies of cooperation that are aimed at tempering the differences in political structures, the asymmetries in economies, and the distance in culture that make relations between the European and South-Mediterranean countries often elusive and strained. The problems of building stable institutions of cooperation are the inevitable consequence of varying cultural, political and economic identities as well as of the different strategies of the two groups of states in the world political and economic arena.

1. Introduction

For the past five centuries, the governance and the institutions of the global political system changed at the end of great wars that had been fought mainly in Europe, including the Thirty Years War, the War of Spanish Succession, and the Wars of Napoleon. The political institutions of the contemporary world system, instead, are the output of the long war, namely the two World Wars that had the whole earth as their theatre and that moved the leadership of the system from Europe to North America. Europe ceased to be the core of the governing institutions of the world political system and entered into a tremendous process of change that has changed the fundamental

attributes of the European states. As S. A. Milward has argued, the rationale for this process appears to be the rescue of Europe and its states and societies from the consequences of the loss of their centrality in the world system as well as from the new challenges of the world environment.

At the present stage, the returns of the integration process are positive to the whole, i.e. to Europe as such, and also to its parts, i.e. the European states. Europe is a stable international region and a much different one from the rest of the world. The institutionalized and ever closer union that binds together almost all the states of the continent is a strong presence in, and an emerging actor of, the world political and economic system. Consequently, the relations between the European states and the states in the surrounding areas differ greatly from what they used to be. In particular, the relations with the Mediterranean countries, which were often smooth and tranquil but on occasion also rough and harsh, are today of high concern to the policy-makers of both the European governments and the European Union.

The programs and policies of the Union towards the Mediterranean, though afflicted by inconsistency and collective action problems, are gradually taking over the policies of the single member states. However, the institutional fragmentation of the group of the Arab and Islamic countries of the Mediterranean, their low economic growth and poorly responsive political regime have been keeping the relations between the countries on the two shores of the Mediterranean sea in an intense and elusive stance over the years.

2. Europe: Integration Process at the Nucleus of the World System

The reorganization of the state to meet with complex interdependence is mostly needed in the areas of the world that have an high number of economically and politically developed states, a highly politicized social sphere and intensive cross-border flows. Integration is the European answer to the challenges of interdependence. To tackle these, Europeans opted for creating a multi-state system comprised of institutions of government (the Commission and the Council), political representation (the Parliament) and functional representation (committees, social dialogue fora, and the like).

That meant a remarkable reshaping of the relationship between nation and government in Europe comparable to what happened some two hundred years earlier, i.e. after the French Revolution, when there was no better choice than building up a new political organization, the nation-state. This reshaping and the European integration process have been developing on an evolutionary course punctuated by formal and informal negotiation events organized for the sake of adapting the initial project to changed domestic and international conditions.

The incessant adaptation of the initial design to the new environment conditions has been propelled by national governments and concerned actors like the European Commission, the European political parties and a considerable number of opinion groups and interest organizations. In informal talks, these actors scrutinize competing designs, and in recurrent intergovernmental conferences (IGCs) agree on the *better off* strategy to refashion the integration program by taking into consideration past experience, new problems, and the preferred outlook of the future.

Political scientists are not very much concerned with the *grand theory* approach to the analysis of political system change. The study of politics of twenty-first century Europe is dominated by the analysis of the narrow theme of the convergence of national public policies rather than by the macro-level analysis of the evolutionary change of the European polity. On the contrary, this analysis of the European process of change is driven by the actors' ability to learn from the past about how to select new options and make common rules and policies is coherent with the social evolutionist approach, in particular with the George Modelski's model of evolutionary world politics.

By focusing on the pressures of the external environment on Europe, the integration process is recognized as the way Europe copes with the evolution of the global system. Accordingly, it is the dynamics of Europe's change and the decisions that continually update the integration process, rather than the contingent choices of policy-makers worried about short-term problems on the national agenda, that are recognized as unavoidable given the need to keep with the pace of change of the world system. Modelski's four-phase cycle of political change is the instrument that helps to explain the intrinsic link between Europe's change and the world system evolution. The synchronization of the European integration and global system process is marked by the two World Wars, i.e. the macro-decision event that gave birth both to the contemporary cycle of world politics and Europe's polity (see Table 1).

	1914-1945	c.1945-1973	c. 1973-2000	c. 2000-2026
	Macro-decision	Execution	Agenda-setting	Coalition-building
World	(First and Second) World War	The Western coalition strategy implemented by the UN and the world economic institutions	Competing views of new global problems emerge	New alignments of countries to foster the new global agenda
Europe	Nationalism contended and overhauled by the supra-national option	The neo-functionalist program implemented as the pathway to economic integration and political union	Competing views of integration deepening and political unification emerge	Union building through treaty reform is fostered by coalitions of governments

Table 1. The phases of the contemporary world and European systems

Learning is key to the engagement of political and social actors to the European integration process. The adoption of European-level strategies to tackle the change of the world environment does not take place once and for all, but repeats over time because of the need to cope with new conditions and challenges. Under the pressure of social, economic and cultural change, the process moves forward thanks to the ability of actors like the Union and government officials and the business and organized social groups that want to cope with the continuous change of external and internal conditions by adopting new policies and rules. However, those actors neither share a vision of the challenges and demands nor of the preferred response to these. Therefore, the European

regulative and political space they have been building up is marked by multiplicity of vision and strategy which at time creates inconsistency and inefficiency. Consequently, the actors of the European integration process tend to negotiate reforms in *ad hoc* conferences that, however, make decisions not always satisfactory, not to say definitive or lasting. But, these decisions carry forward a trial and error reform process that keeps the system alive and moving forward.

In the execution phase, the coalition of the Western states, led by the United States, recognized that the world was the increasingly interdependent system functionalist scholars like David Mitrany had uncovered in the early twentieth century by looking at the growing number of new international organizations. Consequently, the Western coalition built the structure of government of the world system on institutions like the United Nations, the IMF, World Bank, and the GATT/today WTO. In the same vein, six European states came to the alike resolve of creating a set of supranational institutions to deal with their interdependence problems. To fit these institutions to the requirements of democracy, social welfare and the expansion of the public domain of the European societies and states, they provided the institutions with mechanisms of institutional checks and balances as well as a set of expandable policy powers.

After the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ESC) in 1952 and the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957, the two milestones of the Europe's change and starting events of the two subsequent phases were the 1969 Summit of the Heads of state and government in The Hague, and the 2002 launching of the Euro and EMU (European Monetary Union) together with the decision to enlarge the Union to the states of Eastern and Central Europe. The two phases broadly overlapped those of the global political system. Apparently, the global level process drives the European one. Local and domestic factors either slow down the pace of change in Europe or slightly modify the movement within the trajectory line.

From 1945 to the early 1970s, the world was organized by political and economic institutions and regimes, and governed by means of rules and policies inspired by liberalism and multilateralism. Functional cooperation was promoted by arrangements such as the OCDE, and universal organizations like UNCTAD. The Soviet Union challenged the American-led structure of government of the world system by supporting political opposition in countries of different areas of the world, but was unable to devise a strategy to successfully challenge the liberal market policies the Western coalition imposed on the organization of the world economy.

To better direct their economic growth in the capitalist market and avoid reciprocal competition, the six original members of the European Community/Union introduced a customs union and common external trade policies. These initial joint measures propped up the project of deepening integration in the economic and political sphere, and reinforced the European resolve to further the integration process. All along the phase of execution of the strategy of the Western coalition, the integration process developed and achieved its primary goals, i.e. economic growth and political accord in Europe.

Confrontation on some issues within the group of the European Community member states was the effect of strains stemming from the world system such as the mounting

deterioration of the world's monetary regime caused by the "dollar-gap", threats to international security problems caused by the nuclear armaments race and the Soviet-American negotiation of non-proliferation agreements, and issues of the relations with the states created by de-colonization. However, in 1971, these global problems pushed the European leaders to issue the declaration on the existence of the *European identity* in world affairs, a declaration made urgent also by the Middle East and oil price crisis. The 1969 Hague Summit gave impulse also to the deepening of the integration process by initiating negotiations on monetary coordination, foreign policy harmonization, and the consequent upgrading of policies and institutions like the budget reform, the earliest enlargement of the powers of the European Parliament and the widening number of sectoral policies.

From the early 1970s to the end of the century, disorder brought in and hurt the world economy with the collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary regime while the rules of the world trade were repaired time and again by long and difficult GATT/WTO negotiations. The world financial crisis and fierce competition between the Western economies and between these and the new industrializing countries lasted until the 1990s when private and institutional economic actors agreed on the so-called *Washington consensus* on neo-liberalism and de-regulation. Regional blocs were acknowledged as one of the most effective way the national economies can use to overcome the risk of decline. In these circumstances, the President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, keen to prevent the decline of the continent's economy, led a great leap forward by bringing about the adoption of the Single Market strategy and the Economic and Monetary Union. At the same time, the enhancement of the economic integration was complemented by the institutional and procedural improvements agreed on by the governments and written in the so-called reform treaties, the Single European Act and the following ones signed in Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice, and Lisbon. These reforms made the deepening of the integration process an easier and swifter one, and the Union a more democratic and transparent polity.

External challenges, i.e. the disaster of the world wars and the uncertainties of the post-war world, therefore explain the demand for integration and the decision of the Six to start the integration process. The risk of economic decline explains the demand for widening economic integration and deepening political unification in the late 1980s and 1990s. External challenges account also for the start of the common policies in the foreign/defense and domestic security sectors. Regarding the former, the volatility and de-alignment of international politics in the agenda-setting phase, and the reshuffling of the global agenda in agreement with the formation of the new public domain of the world system, pushed up the European governments' resolve to differentiate themselves from the United States in the world political affairs. However, they did not take away the European Union governments' awareness of being part, together with the United States, of the nucleus of the world's structure of governance. Regarding the latter, cooperation on justice and domestic security problems started in the 1970s to confront European terrorist and transnational crime groups, and deepened in the last decades to carry out effective measures to counter a new challenge coming from the external world, i.e. the unwanted effects of growing immigration in Europe from the Global South.

At the turn of the century, the widened power of the Union over almost all the areas of the public domain of the European countries, excepting sensitive sectors such as social, fiscal and education policies, has been reached in the belief that a most flexible interpretation of the state domain suits all member countries. While nation-states maintain their control over fiscal policy and the most important parts of welfare policies, this trade-off explains the rather viable and stable European multi-state polity. The worsening of the financial crisis in 2010-2011, however, put this stability under stress. In particular, the existing rules of government of the Euro currency went under the critical examination of the European institutions and governments as well as the criticism of the world financial institutions and the governments of the main economic powers. On lessons learned, i.e. the constructive adaptation of the European states to the past challenges of the world system, a new agreement, albeit provisionally informal, on the scrutiny and driving powers of the Union over the economic policies of the member countries is in prospect in the negotiations of the European governments and institutions over this monetary and financial crisis.

In this early stage of the coalition-building phase of world politics, Europe is also dealing with the de-concentration of power in the world political system and the re-alignment of the world political actors. These changes place strains on the Union which is very much concerned with her global role as well as the policies and strategies to deal with other countries, in particular those bordering it.

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Biographical Sketch

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