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Did EU Membership of the Central and Eastern European Countries Contribute to Peace?

► René Schwok

Introduction

The formula “Central and Eastern Europe countries” (CEECs) refers to the States that either belonged to the USSR or were under its control before 1989. Seven of them joined the EU in 2004: Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In 2007, Bulgaria and Romania joined them.

*Most experts were then raising doubts
about the ability of these countries to reform.*

In the early 1990s, all these States were seen as fragile. Many observers were quite pessimistic about their abilities to avoid falling into forms of autocracy that would eventually threaten peace in the region. Most of these countries enjoyed little or no periods of democracy in their history. Their economies were largely controlled by the State and were most of the time in recession. Their bureaucracies were overstaffed and struggling for reform. Some were under strong nationalist impulses at high bellicose potential.

Most experts were then expressing their concern about the future of the CEECs. They were raising doubts about the ability of these countries to reform, to meet the challenges that they were facing and to transform into stable, developed and democratic countries. Every success of an extremist party was then analyzed as a warning sign of the soon to come disasters.

In addition, it was announced that accession of these CEE countries would destabilize the EU because they had not matured enough its values. It was thus anticipated that they were going either to blow up the Union, or to divert it to the wrong direction.

Václav Klaus, a self-proclaimed *Euroseptic*, often said that accession of Central and Eastern Europe countries (CEECs) to the European Union (EU) did not contribute to their stabilization and to the security of their area. He argues that many other factors have been much more instrumental in bringing peace in Central and Eastern Europe than EU membership. The former Czech prime minister and president also hinted several times that the EU could be a factor of destabilization and chaos.¹

This chapter deals with those arguments and aims at assessing their relevance. In order to proceed in a balanced way, I tried to reconstitute the two main conflicting conceptions: the one of the *Euroseptics* and the one of the *Europeists*.

This reconstruction has primarily a didactic purpose, i.e., to allow a better understanding of a ways of articulating an argument. These two conceptualizations are designed as flexible analytical frameworks: “ideal types” in the Weberian sense. In other words, some researchers and politicians who are quoted in the *Europeist* paradigm can, in relation to other topics, belong to the *Euroseptic* way of thinking and *vice versa*.

My method is dialectical: I will first introduce the *Euroseptic* approach. Then, I will confront it with the opposite view of the *Europeists* (antithesis). In addition, I will assess the cases of some key countries from Central and Eastern Europe. Finally, I will compare the EU CEECs with the non-EU CEECs.

Euroseptic Approach

The first conception is the one of the *Euroseptics*². This approach develops a critical analysis of the dialectical link between absence of war in Europe and advent of the Euro-

¹ Václav Klaus, *Europe: The Shattering of Illusions* (Bloomsbury Continuum 2013).

² Aleks Szczerbiak & Paul Taggart (eds.), *Opposing Europe the Comparative Party Politics of Eurosepticism. Comparative and Theoretical Perspectives* (Oxford University Press 2008).

pean Union. *Euro-sceptics* such as Václav Klaus dispute the assertion that EU enlargements contributed to security and peace in Europe. First, they challenge the idea that the EU's characteristics, methods and policies have reduced the risks of war. Second, they suggest that there are other factors, beyond the issue of EU membership, which were more effective for stabilizing the Central and Eastern European countries.

Accordingly, any explanation of the pacification of this area has to be related to the own merits of these States and also to their incorporation into NATO. Third, some *Euro-sceptics* even claim that EU enlargement can even be a factor of destabilization.

On a conceptual level, the *Euro-sceptic* approach uses generally unflattering terms for characterizing EU action such as: naive, pacifist, political dwarf, small power, big Switzerland, Venus (compared to Mars).

European integration has not been a major factor of peace

Euro-sceptics do not consider EU legislations as an international kind of law as envisaged by Kantian political liberalism. They see it as mainly economic.³ Therefore, EU law cannot contribute to the resolution of international conflicts. EU law does not address the issues of war and peace between the Member States. So according to the *Euro-sceptics*, it is misleading to convey the message that the significant progress of Community law could be something comparable to the development of international law as envisaged by the cosmopolitist doctrine.

In addition, according to the *Euro-sceptics*, the EU does not have a monopoly of legitimate violence in the Weberian sense. It has neither an army nor a police force that could operate on the territory of the Member States. Moreover, when there are problems within the EU that could cause a conflict with military dimensions (Northern Ireland, Cyprus, the Basque country, Catalonia), the Union takes great care not to interfere. And there is clear evidence in the Treaties that the European security and defense policy should only be exercised outside the EU.

³ Tony Judt, *A Grand Illusion. An Essay on Europe* (New York University Press 2001).

Researchers belonging to the *Eurosceptic* school of thought have also never missed to express their deepest doubts on the so-called qualities of functionalism. First, they point out that, despite the development of numerous specialized regional and international organizations in the world, the number of conflicts in the world remains just as high as in the past.

The EU does not have a monopoly of legitimate violence.

In addition, *Eurosceptics* point out that technocracy could be itself a factor of conflict because technocrats, such as the so-called *Eurocrats*, are not elected by a popular vote. They have no accountability towards their voters and tend to make decisions with cold rationality in a kind of ivory tower isolated from realities.

Finally, this technostucture is subject to pressure from lobbying groups with which it works closely. In other words, European integration is not driven by the politicians but by a technostucture responding to proposals from private interest groups, as it is practiced in the United States.

Other factors that enlargement explain peace

The *Eurosceptic* approach considers that the relatively good performance of the CEE countries, as well as peace in this region, is the result of multiple components that are distinct from their accession to the EU. *Eurosceptics* point out that it has passed more than a decade between the end of the communist domination and their accession to the EU. During this period, these countries had already consolidated their democracy, established rule of law and liberalized their economies. Thus, the CEECs were on the right track regardless of EU membership.

Concerning the issue of security, realists rather emphasize the positive role played by NATO enlargement than by the EU one. Indeed, all CEE countries have become members of the Atlantic Alliance before joining the European Union. This organization offers much better security protection than the EU because it provides a collective defense

mechanism (art. 5), which commits its members to help each other when one of them is attacked. Such solidarity does not exist in the EU, even though a few articles of the Lisbon Treaty can create the illusion (Art. 42 § 7 TEU and art. 222 TFEU).

Added to this is that the most important member of the Atlantic Alliance is the United States. The main army in the world demonstrated in history that it alone has the capacity to assist allies who have difficulties in terms of security. Clearly, the European states do not today possess such capacities of intervention. Finally, NATO has played a substantial role in reforming the armed forces of the CEECs, making them all the more effective and more democratic.

Free trade is neither positive nor a peace factor

The issue of free trade is one of the most controversial one. *Euroseptics* express all kinds of assessment of free trade from the ultra-liberal side to the Marxist camp.

Numerous British and American economists are claiming that the EU does not promote free trade enough.

For the former, for instance numerous British and American economists, the EU does not promote free trade enough. This is also the view of Václav Klaus. Accordingly, the EU contributes to poor economic health of Europe, to the impoverishment of the population and to dissatisfaction. This fuels political tensions. Basically, the EU remains too protectionist and therefore does not promote peace.

Another criticism of the liberal right is that the EU is limited geographically. Its free trade extends primarily to its Member States. But this creates as a result a sort of protectionism against countries that do not belong to it. For sure, the EU does not raise new barriers towards third countries, but it creates a diversion of trade and services. In addition, *Euroseptics* accuse the EU of multiplying bilateral free trade agreements at the expense of the World Trade Organization (WTO). This undermines the multilateral system of

the post-War, which aims at maintaining a universalist dimension. Once again, this has discriminatory protectionist consequences for those who are not EU members.

Critics expressed by far left people are, in turn, very different. It considers that the EU is too much oriented towards free trade and too favorable to the interests of the big capital. This contributes to increase social inequality. Consequently, this creates frustration and revolts that lead to conflicts. This is the view developed by the Marxist approach, for which trade between capitalist economies derive from the exploitation of the proletariat; this leads to imperialism and ultimately to war.

Far left thinkers challenge the chain of reasoning supporting the positive effects of free trade.⁴ First, they consider that free trade does not improve the wellbeing of the population and that it badly damages small and medium enterprises. Accordingly, the international division of labor benefits only the most efficient companies and crushes the weakest ones. Innovation is not always positive and is not determined by international competition. Finally, economies of scale do not contribute to a better quality but to the standardization of consumption patterns.

Having developed such a negative analysis, it is no wonder that Marxists doubt that free trade can contribute to a virtuous spillover towards peace.⁵ If populations are impoverished and frustrated, they will be receptive to the calls of the xenophobic parties who look for scapegoats among foreign populations and countries. In addition, the States that are the losers in the free trade competition are the ones who will naturally tend to seek international confrontation.

The Marxist approach always considered that market economy promotes armed confrontation between powers because they are so eager to take ownership of external markets. Therefore interdependence can lead to armed conflict. According to the arguments of the theory of unequal exchange, international trade is a source of conflict. Economic values have become instruments of power, based in particular on, either the monopoly

⁴ Chad Damro, 'Market Power Europe' *Journal of European Public Policy*, 2012, 19, 5, pp. 682-699.

⁵ Jacques Fontanel 2014, 'Le commerce international est-il un facteur de paix ?' *Politique étrangère*, 2014, 1, pp. 55-67.

of natural resources, or on the financial or technological superiority of one country such as Germany. This type of arguments was for a long time the discourse of the communist propaganda relayed by Moscow.

Other factors that the EU was more decisive for bringing peace

For *Euroseptics*, many geopolitical and economic factors contributed much more to the preservation of peace in Central and Eastern Europe than European integration. There are broadly speaking two types of interpretation. The first approach is rather idealist and the second one is more realist.

An idealist view

For idealists, it is the shock of wars, especially of the Second World War, that led the Europeans to develop a deep aversion of wars. They admit that this has facilitated the acceptance of the ideology of European cooperation, but it does mean that European integration *per se* had any impact of peace.⁶

In other words, even if there had been no European integration, the result in terms of peace would have been the same. Accordingly, the development of democracy, rule of law, human rights and protection of minorities in Europe primarily drove peace but this has nothing to do with European integration.

This political and humanitarian progress was made in parallel with a substantial economic growth, a considerable development of social protection (welfare state) and a substantial societal liberation (decline of parental authoritarianism, secularization, emancipation of women, tolerance of various sexual practice). All these factors have been more

⁶Elie Barnavi, 'L'Europe, ce n'est pas la paix, c'est la conséquence de la paix' *Le Monde*, 8 October 2013.

decisive than European integration to calm the frustrations of the people and to limit the risks of their exploitation for war purposes. This produced a virtuous spillover that has moved away the minds from warmonger's impulses.

One finds here elements of the so-called *democratic peace theory*⁷ that argues that war has become inconceivable in Central and Eastern Europe, not because of the unification of Europe, but because it is now composed of democratic States. According to this view, liberal democracies do not fight one another, although they can go to war.

A realistic view

Another *Euro-sceptic* view is, on the contrary, rather realistic. It is particularly developed in the United States, among political scientists of the theory of international relations. According to this interpretation, it is the "American protection + NATO" which primarily explains the improvement of security in Central and Eastern Europe. Expansion of NATO contributed to legitimize the US presence and to formalize the military alliance with the CEECs; this contributed more than EU membership to the diminishing of the risks of war in Europe.⁸

In other words, the *Euro-sceptics* reverse the argument put forward by the *Europeists*. The independent variable becomes the dependent variable, and *vice versa*. Because according to their view, peace in Europe should be attributed to factors other than the European project; but they admit that the EU made profit of this security in order to develop itself under its umbrella.⁹

⁷ Michael Doyle, 'Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Policy' *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 12, 1983, pp. 205–235 and 323–353.

⁸ David Green, 'Has Europe Solved the Problem of War ? Explaining the « Long Peace » of the post-1945 era' *European Review*, 2010, 18, 3, pp. 365-377.

⁹ Adrian Hyde-Price, 'Normative power Europe: A Realist Critique' *Journal of European Public Policy*, 2006, 13, 2, pp. 217-234.

Negative effects of membership

The *Eurosceptic* approach does not miss an opportunity to point out that enlargements have sometimes had negative effects in terms of security. Thus, Václav Klaus has often equated the EU to the Soviet Union. He criticized its so-called colonialist and socialist policies, which challenge the independence of the Member States and impoverish them. All these elements, from his point of view, increase the destabilization of the States in the region and sow the seeds of potential conflicts.

On the far left, on the opposite of the political spectrum, there are recurrent criticism of the EU's actions. There are considered to have been in favor of large multinational companies at the expense of small businesses, workers and retirees. Social inequalities have increased as well as unemployment. This bad situation is a fertile ground for reactionary, nationalist and racist forces.¹⁰ This can be observed in Hungary where fascistic people tend to play the ethnic card in Slovakia and Romania; those policies fuel regional tensions.

Europeist Approach

The conception of the *Europeists* is the view developed by the supporters of the European Union. Their arguments are basically the following ones. First of all, they claim that the shock of the two world wars, particularly of the Second, was the main catalyst of the European unification's project.

In other words, the main driver of the European construction was an idealistic commitment to build a lasting peace, through the rejection of past wars.

In a second stage, the *Europeists* attribute the absence of war in Europe to the very existence of the EU. From their perspective, it is the qualities of the European Union that primarily explain the absence of war on the territory of the member States, including the CEECs.

¹⁰Philippe Marlier, 'L'Europe de la paix, cette grande illusion' Mediapart, 22 October 2012.

On a conceptual level, this school of thought has developed a sophisticated vocabulary for highlighting the EU's original contribution to peace: civil power, normative power, and soft power.

The chain of thought of the *Europeists* can be sum up broadly this way: enlargements enhance security in Europe because EU membership strengthens the following positive elements: interdependence, supranationality, law, cooperation between leaders, professionalism of the experts and economic free trade.

This is why the EU considered that one of the objectives of these enlargements was to strengthen the stability of these States by supporting the moderate and pro-Western forces in order to undermine the nostalgic circles of the communist time as well as the xenophobic nationalists.

This *Europeist* conception of the world is a kind of synthesis between Kantian liberalism, functionalism and free trade.

Kantian liberalism

Cosmopolitan political liberalism has its main origins in Immanuel Kant and his book "Perpetual peace". The German philosopher has influenced numerous thinkers. In broad terms, Kant is convinced that international peace is possible. This is an assumption, which remains disputed by many realists until today. Second, he posits that we can envisage the conditions of its completion.

According to Kant, in order to promote the coming of world peace, at least three conditions are necessary. In the first place, there is international trade (I will consider this point below).

Secondly, it is necessary to base relations between States on law, otherwise the state of war will continue. He considers the development of international law as the main fac-

tor of pacification. Because absence of a superior law - applied by a legitimate authority that is holding a monopoly on violence - is considered as one of the main triggers of war. This is why the EU, by being the main regional integration organization to have created a supranational law, is a major contributor to the pacification of the international society.

Thirdly, it is necessary to transform each State into a republic. Only such a system makes it possible the separation of the legislative power from the executive power. If the people are truly involved in the power, the latter cannot initiate a war because it should undergo the consequences. In despotic regimes in which the executive and legislative are amalgamated, the decision to start a war depends only on the goodwill of the ruler, who can disregard the interests of his people. Therefore, peace can only be built on the republicanization of States. Although not all States that compose the EU are *stricto sensu* republics, but they are constitutional monarchies.

Functionalism

Functionalism is a school of thought represented in particular by David Mitrany whose objective is to develop a peaceful international system through functional organs which transcend the nation state.¹¹ According to Mitrany, the solution to preserve peace is based on the following argument: instead of hoping peace through an unlikely political settlement among all the States, it is better to understand what unites these States and to exploit their relationships as opportunities for tightening interdependencies.

Interstate security arrangements are therefore considered as insufficient: be it military alliances or pacts, they do not solve the fundamental issues. This type of security is not sustainable in the long term. It is rather necessary to move towards a much wider societal security, by taking into account the needs of the people. His conception involves the establishment of cooperative mechanisms based on the organization of a variety of international public services.

¹¹ David Mitrany, *A Working Peace System. An Argument for the Functional Development of International Organization* (Quadrangle Books 1966).

This method of action offers at least three benefits. First, it reduces the omnipotence of States, it frames their sovereignty and it slows down their bellicose impulses by promoting an entanglement of interests.

Second, it facilitates international reconciliation by avoiding political divisions. By focusing on the satisfaction of common economic and social needs, it relativizes the issue of the forms and of the political objectives.

The third advantage of the functionalist method is to initiate a transformation of the international system by betting on the role of experience and learning. The development and the success of international public services do not just strengthen the interdependencies; they also contribute to sow the seeds of a new sense of international responsibility.

Technocracy

There is also inherently to the functionalist approach, a dedication to technocracy. Technocracy is a form of government in which the place of technical experts and their methods is central for making decisions. Rather than politicians, it is intellectuals and technicians who are put in the foreground, i.e. people who are supposed to understand each other because they roughly speak a common language, whatever their origins. The advantage of technocrats compared to politicians is that they are very well trained, that they are selected according to meritocratic criteria and that they have a long-term vision, which is not the one of their next election campaign. They are also supposed to be less dependent on economic and political lobbies.

The question is whether such promotion of technocracy has the slightest effect on the issue of the establishment of peace in Europe. For sure, Jean Monnet agreed with these functionalist conceptions, even if he did not explicitly mention them in his written contributions.

The “Monnet method” promotes the idea of shared interest as cement “par excellence” of international cooperation. Integration has to be carried function after function, in

proportion to the achievements made on the ground. The wish is that the process is afterward expanded to other areas. What neo-functionalism popularized through the expression of spill over effect.¹²

The Schuman Declaration, inspired by Monnet, was very explicit about the path European integration had to follow: "Europe will not happen all at once, or according to a single plan it will be built through concrete achievements which first create a *de facto* solidarity "(Schuman, 9 May 1950).¹³

A unique level of integration

The European Union is much more integrated and supranational than any **other** regional organization in the world. The *Europeists* emphasize that no other institution has so much called into question the formal sovereignty of States. Certainly, there are dozens of regional organizations in Europe, Africa, America, Asia and the Middle East. But none has gone as far in the direction of supranationality.¹⁴

Let us also note that the European Union is the organization of regional integration that has the largest number of civil servants (over 60,000), if one includes the numerous specialized agencies and the European Central Bank, (ECB). The EU is also endowed with the largest budget, nearly 140 billion euros per year.

In addition, meetings between representatives of Member States, even at subordinate levels, are daily. They often include representatives of groups of interest who are numerous, nearly 30,000. This demonstrates the extent of European integration. All these characteristics are the main features of the EU when it is compared with other organizations of regional integration.

¹² René Schwok, *Théories de l'intégration européenne* (Montchrestien, 2005), p. 53.

¹³ Marie-Thérèse Bitsch, 'Robert Schuman et la paix' in *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, 108, 2012, pp. 33-38.

¹⁴ René Schwok, 'Peculiarities of the European Union's External Action' in Mario Telo (ed.), *Globalisation, Multilateralism, Europe* (Ashgate 2013), pp. 91-106.

Such a level of integration fosters peace

The most interesting issue is whether this substantial level of supranationality, this tremendous legal development, this technocracy and this high degree of interdependence have any impact on peace in Europe.

One argument is that supranationality, as its name suggests, is a form of overtaking of the nation state. According to the *Europeists*, nationalism, if excessive, is a factor of war. Therefore, if it is weakened, this reduces the likelihood of international conflicts.

Secondly, interdependence facilitates cooperation, as well as the respect of everyone's interest. Meetings between top leaders boost personal connections that may be useful to mitigate crises. Such integration prevents misunderstandings and promotes a routinization of dialogue. Interdependence creates mutual interests that would be costly to suspend by choosing to resort to strategies of conflict. All these elements reduce the risks of war.

Thirdly, technocracy is seen as a contribution to peace because it gives experts the responsibility for managing European affairs. They are expected to act with more competence, integrity and sense of the general interest than traditional politicians. In addition, they speak a common language despite their different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This facilitates the search for effective and peaceful solutions by avoiding mutual misunderstandings. Experts often create networks, linking each other's through formal and informal connections. This has the consequence, in the case of crises between States' leaders, to limit damage and to maintain a pacifying stability.

Political integration thus contributes to peace because it creates the conditions for cooperation among States, so that they reconcile their different national goals.¹⁵

¹⁵ Roger De Weck, 'Neither Reich nor Nation : another Future for the European Union' in Thomas Jansen (ed.) *Reflections on European Identity* (European Commission – Forward Studies Unit 1999), pp. 107-111.

Free trade is a major factor of peace

For some *Europeists*, one of the EU's merits is to enable an effective fight against protectionism by promoting free trade. According to this view, fighting protectionism is not only a factor of economic growth, but also of peace. Since the EU is the international organization that has the most developed free trade among its members, it is logical to anticipate that its impact on peace would be significant.

Free trade is a theory designed to promote development of trade through the removal of quotas, tariffs and non-tariff barriers. This also requires the dismantling of barriers on the movement of goods, services and capital. In the case of the EU, this also extends to people.

In political and economic theory, the link between peace and development of trade has a long tradition. For example, Montesquieu is known to have coined the term "soft trade".¹⁶ He is also the author of the famous quote that is systematically reproduced by advocates of free trade: "The natural effect of trade is to bring peace."

The first point to establish is the assertion that the EU has actually more fought protectionism than any other organization of regional integration. The *Europeists* underline that no other organization has gone so far in the removal of obstacles to trade. A few other regional organizations have been successful in abolishing customs duties for their member states and some other barriers, but this has never included agricultural and fishery products.

Above all, other regional organizations have so far not included most of the so-called non-tariff barrier, i.e., harmonization of standards, certificates, testing, and access to public procurement. One should also note the importance of the substantial development in European competition law, which, as its name suggests, serves to promote competition by fighting cartel-like agreements, oligopolies or state financial support. All these elements, combined with the introduction of a supranational currency for the countries of the euro area, are the EU's main specificities in international comparison.

¹⁶ Haig Patapan, 'Democratic international relations: Montesquieu and the theoretical foundations of democratic peace theory' *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 66, 2012, pp. 313-329.

Such a high level of free trade promotes peace

The second point is whether this development of free trade has had any effect to promote peace. This issue was particularly disputed and raised countless controversies.

Opening of countries to foreign trade forces companies to be more innovative in order to remain competitive on foreign markets.

What is certain is that the EU founding fathers were convinced that protectionism is responsible for economic rivalries and as one of the factors of the beginning of wars. So Jean Monnet equated protectionism to a plague that has to be fought by all means. He saw it as one of the main triggers of war and wanted to avoid a return of Europe to the situation prior to 1939. In his conception, protectionism can be compared to a form of economic nationalism that generates hate that could lead to war. German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and Dutch Foreign Minister Johan Willem Beyen, as well as numerous other European leaders shared this same view.

Basically, how is articulated the argument that trade development/ reduction of protectionism is a vector of peace? The chain of reasoning is broadly the following:

1. Free trade improves well-being. Its main virtue is to stimulate lower prices of products due to increased competition. The opening to foreign trade also stimulates internal growth through its impact on investment. This provides purchasing power gains for consumers, gains that outweigh the losses of some companies or sectors.
2. To the extent that foreign trade facilitates the diffusion of technology and expands the potential market for domestic enterprises, participation in international trade accelerates gains in productivity thanks to the phenomena of division of labor, learning processes and economies of scale.

3. Opening of countries to foreign trade forces companies to be more innovative in order to remain competitive on foreign markets. This results in an extension of the R & D budgets. Since intra-industry trade between industrialized countries dominates contemporary international trade, product's differentiation appears as a key driver of international trade and, so, of internal growth in innovative societies.

This means that free trade is a vector of peace for the following main reasons:

1. due to the increase in distributable surplus which is generated, it can increase the income of all social groups. If people are wealthier, they are less frustrated and less receptive to the calls by populists and warmongers.
2. Free trade is at the service of the public interest contrary to public interventions defending special interests because the latter create resentment that can be exploited in a confrontational manner.
3. Free trade corrects international inequalities. The distribution of the gains from trade among trading partners would take place spontaneously in favor of the poor as evidenced by the "paradox of Stuart Mill."¹⁷ Compared to small and poor countries, rich countries receive a smaller share of the gains from trade because of the importance of their demand, which increases the price of the products they import. Less frustration from poor countries will cause less revanchist wars.
4. Free trade also influences peace in another way. Free trade of goods, services, capital and people also incorporates ideas and cultures. It transfers ideas, cultures, and technology that manifest themselves through the aspirations among citizens of other countries to gain access to more rights and more freedom.

¹⁷ Alan Charles Kors, 'The Paradox of John Stuart Mill' *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 28, May 2011, pp. 1-18.

Solidarity

Europeists also point out the importance of the EU solidarity funds devolved mainly to the poorest regions of the new Member States. From an ideological point of view, the concept is rather of social democratic inspiration. The rationale behind this is that the wealthiest EU countries from Western Europe are massively helping the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as they are much poorer, unstable and fragile. In other words, even if the principles of market economy are essential to the development of these new members, it must be accompanied by a substantial effort of redistribution.

In the context of the various enlargements, the EU has developed significant financial instruments in order to strengthen economic and internal social cohesion. They help to Member States whose per capita income is less than 90% of the Community average. They place particular emphasis on infrastructure.

Currently, all of these funds represent a very impressive amount of nearly 60 billion euros per year, nearly 35% of the EU budget. These are incomparably higher than those distributed by other international solidarity mechanisms. Note that these funds are gifts and not loans such as the ones from the World Bank and other regional development banks like the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Assessment

In this assessment, I first analyze the German and Russian issues. Then I focus on a few CEECs in order to assess how much EU membership contributed, or not, to their stabilization. Finally, I compare countries of Central and Eastern Europe who joined the EU with the ones who stayed outside.

The German issue in the context of enlargement

Since the end of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, the Federal Republic of Germany quickly regained its influence in the region. Economic indicators show that it became the main economic partner of the CEECs, as well as its first investor. In addition

there are numerous exchanges of populations and a myriad of other relationships.

German economic dominance over Central and Eastern Europe was therefore inevitable. But the populations of some in those States, especially in Poland and in the Czech Republic, were keeping very bad memories of German atrocities committed in the past. It was thus necessary to prevent that Germany, the main economic power, becomes at the same time a political, a militarily as well as a cultural hegemonic power.¹⁸

This would have been a source of extreme tension. The solution was to decouple those different levels.¹⁹

In the military sphere, it is the expansion of NATO, which has been the single most substantial element of this decoupling. This organization ensures that the main military power in the region is not Germany or even another European country but a very remote state: the United States, a country that has little economic interests in Central and Eastern Europe.

In cultural matters, English language is prevailing over German, unlike the situation that was dominant at time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

At the political level, it is precisely the enlargement of the EU that was decisive. This institution allowed the CEECs to eventually find a place in Europe on an equal basis. By becoming members of the EU, the CEECs gained more opportunities to use communication channels independent from Germany. They could also participate in coalitions with other EU countries that avoided their unilateral and asymmetrical dependence vis-à-vis the Federal Republic.

German leaders were the first to develop this type of thinking.²⁰ They were aware of the burden of the past and of the risks caused by a possible return of a German colossus

¹⁸ Frank Schimmelfennig, 'The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union' *International Organization*, 2001, 55, 1, Winter, pp. 47-80.

¹⁹ Marcin Zaborowski, 'More than simply Expanding Markets: Germany and EU Enlargement in Helene Sjurson (ed.) *Questioning EU Enlargement : Europe in Search of Identity* (Routledge 2006), pp. 104-120.

²⁰ Philip Gordon, 'La normalisation de la politique étrangère de l'Allemagne' *Politique étrangère*, 1994, 59, 2, pp. 497-516.

in Mitteleuropa. They therefore put the equation that a EU enlargement to the East was a *sine qua non* condition for a peaceful comeback of the CEECs in the international society and therefore for promoting stability in Europe.

The Russian question in the context of enlargement

The relationship with Russia was also one of the motivations of enlargement to the CEECs. EU membership was one of the methods used by the leaders of these States to get rid of the influence of this big neighbor. EU Member States were sharing the same objective: enlargement was seen as an instrument to move away the Russian potential threat hundred kilometers to the East.

In the 1990s and until the beginning of the 2000s, the discourse of the EU and CEECs' leaders focused primarily on the instability and on the decadence of Russia (cf., President Boris Yeltsin, the economic crisis and Russian mafia). In this context, EU membership was presented as constituting a bulwark against the spread of the delinquency of Russia and therefore as a security for the entire Old Continent.

After President Putin strengthened his power in the Kremlin, it is rather the overtones of Russian imperialism that awakened concerns among the CEECs, particularly among those that have a common border with the Russian Federation.

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The argument became then as follows. Thanks to the enlargement of the EU to the CEECs, imperialist Russia will be deterred from attacking a CEEC because it would run the risk of a confrontation with all Western countries. Moscow would even avoid putting pressure on one country for fear of attracting not only military but also political and economic reprisals from Western Europe.

Poland

Poland is the largest state among the CEE countries in terms of population (38.5 million). Strong nationalist pulses related to its geographical position between Germany and Russia and its tragic history traversed this state.

In the early 1990s, at the end of Communism, per capita income was lower than in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. The percentage of farmers in the active population was particularly significant (over 30%). Many people had to emigrate in order to find a job, mainly in Germany and in the UK. In addition, the government administered a “shock therapy” aimed at liberalizing the economy. At that time, it generated a severe recession which enhanced social inequality and increased impoverishment.

Such a situation could have been a fertile ground for the development of extremist political parties, either of nostalgics of communism or of proponents of radical solutions.

Nationalist forces benefited from such favorable circumstances to come to power. This was the case of the twin brothers Lech and Jaroslaw Kaczynski, who were respectively President and Prime Minister of Poland, sometimes at the same time in 2006-2007. During their electoral campaign, they did not hesitate to come closer to anti-European religious parties.

If Poland managed to maintain a moderate policy in such circumstances, it is in part due to its membership of the EU.²¹ Indeed, this country had already introduced many reforms in order to adopt the “EU *acquis*” before its accession in 2004. It would have been very costly to unravel this entire legislative skein. Above all, Poland had become extremely dependent on the Solidarity Fund of the European Union. They currently amount to almost 10 billion euros per year. This gives an idea of their importance. This country is now the largest recipient of EU funds for cohesion, even ahead of Spain. Such aid would have been frozen in case of bad conduct on the part of Poland.

Add to this that Polish farmers, a large reservoir of voters for populist conservatives and nationalists parties like *Law and Justice* of the Kaczyński brothers, had been

²¹ Elizabeth Pond, ‘Poland: The Success of European Integration’ World Policy Blog, 11 October 2011.

converted to the European cause. Thus, from 2004 onwards, Polish farmers began to benefit from substantial EU farm subsidies that were a boon for this generally poor population. In addition, they began to profit from the dismantling of agricultural protectionism in the EU Western European States. This allowed them to export in these countries with high purchasing power. All those elements explain why the nationalist parties have thought twice before engaging in anti-European activities because it could have costed them an important loss of voters.

Slovakia

In Slovakia, the rise of the nationalist movement had already occurred in the 1990s during the period of the government of Vladimír Mečiar. He had been elected prime minister in November 1994. It is during this period that he introduced the most controversial and authoritarian aspects of his policy. They had the effect of isolating Slovakia from the rest of Europe and to delay its integration into NATO until 2004, unlike its Czech neighbor that already joined the Alliance in 1999.

Slovakia was admittedly not a EU member during the Mečiar era, but accession was already its objective. The idea that all other Central European States would soon join the EU, with the exception of Slovakia, convinced Bratislava to avoid the imposition of anti-liberal legislations. In 1998, Mečiar had to leave as head of government and his successors finally set course towards European integration. So much so that Slovakia was in 2009 the first State among the CEE countries to adopt the euro. This was mainly due to political reasons in order to strengthen its European integration and to be placed in the core of the EU.²²

²² Milan Nič, Marek Slobodník, and Michal Šimečka, *Slovakia in the EU: An Unexpected Success Story?* (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik 2014).

Hungary

Hungary is another emblematic case. Since 2010, the *Fidesz* party led by Viktor Orbán is leading the government with a very large support. Orbán had already been prime minister between 1998 and 2002 and then appeared as a moderate and pro-European liberal. But in recent years, his discourse was radicalized in a much more nationalist, conservative and anti-liberal direction.

His party and Orbán himself sometimes came close to the radical *Jobbik* party. This political formation obtained more than 20% of the vote in parliamentary elections in 2014. *Jobbik* expresses nostalgia of the period of dictatorship of Miklós Horthy. It makes so-called cosmopolitanism responsible of all the problems and develops a latent anti-Semitism. It is particularly violent in relation to the Roma minority. *Jobbik* would like to return to the borders of Greater Hungary of before the Treaty of Trianon (1920) and is unfavorable to European integration.

It happened that the Orbán government adopted some of *Jobbik's* views such as the one on the Hungarian diaspora. It passed a constitutional amendment on dual citizenship for Hungarian-speaking minorities living outside the national territory. This obviously created tensions with Slovakia and Romania; needless to say that it is dangerous for international security.

This government also introduced other legislation such as a media control law that was widely criticized by several EU countries and even by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

Nationalist, authoritarian and xenophobic tendencies in Hungary could have been even worse if the country was not a EU member.²³ They could have caused serious international difficulties with its neighbors. The fact that the Orbán government has moderated his program is to be credited to its membership of the EU and its fear of losing its benefits if he persisted in a way too extreme.

²³ Krisztián Ungváry, *Hungary and the European Union 1989-2014 – a Success Story?* (Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2014).

The Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic States

Improving the lot of Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic countries is another element that has underpinned the issue of EU enlargement, as it could have been a potentially destabilizing issue. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania tended to discriminate against people of Russian origin and to deny them access to citizenship because they were sometimes considered as a kind of settlers who are unable to assimilate in the Baltic States. In a context of independence after years of Soviet/Russian occupation, the climate was little inclined to tolerance.

Such Baltic behavior is potentially dangerous because the Kremlin might be tempted to go to war in order to rescue its fellow citizens. Moreover, in the terminology of Moscow, those are Russians and not Russian-speaking minorities; this expression further underlines its self-proclaimed legitimacy to worry about their fate.

Therefore, to avoid a Russian military intervention, the EU has set as a condition for entry of the three Baltic countries in the EU that they waive their discriminatory policies against their minorities.²⁴ And even after they had become EU members, the European Commission has ensured that those minority populations continue to be well treated in order to avoid conflict with Moscow.²⁵

Geographical comparison

Another striking element is the difference of situation between the countries of Eastern European CEECs belonging to the EU and the ones staying outside this organization. The latter are all experiencing bad, if not tragic situations. The most emblematic case is that of Ukraine which embodies all the problems by himself. The *per capita* income in that State has remained very low and is even decreasing. This country works so poorly that one

²⁴ Michael Johns 'Do As I Say, Not As I Do': The European Union, Eastern Europe and Minority Rights' *East European Politics and Societies*, 2003, 17, 4, pp. 682–699.

²⁵ Jean-Bernard Adrey, 'Minority Language Rights Before and After the 2004 EU Enlargement: The Copenhagen Criteria in the Baltic States' *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 2005, 26, 5, pp. 453–468.

sometimes uses the term of “failed state” to describe it. The political class is largely corrupt and elections are often held at the limit of legality. More dramatically, this country was carved up of a part of its territory by Russia (Crimea). And separatist rebels supported by the Kremlin are triggering a civil war.

The situation in Georgia is hardly more encouraging and the country has also gone through wars. Separatists also supported by Moscow occupy twenty per cent of its territory (Abkhazia and South Ossetia).

Azerbaijan also lost part of its land following a conflict that has left hundreds of thousands of victims and refugees. Armenia now occupies not only Nagorno-Karabakh but also a large region called the Lachin corridor. Many experts expect a resumption of hostilities in the near future.

Belarus faces a particularly harsh dictatorship and has a low level of development. It is the only country that has not been accepted in the Council of Europe because of the ruthlessness of its political regime and its failure to respect democratic criteria and human rights.

It is also worth mentioning Russia. This country is experiencing an authoritarian drift that challenges some progress made in the 1990s in terms of freedom of expression and respect of human rights. The Kremlin has continued to solve some of its internal and external problems by violence. In the 1990s, a terrible crackdown had befallen on the Chechen separatists and there were hundreds of thousands of deaths. This resulted in massive displacement of population and in the destruction of cities such as the capital Grozny. As already mentioned, in the 2000s, the regime of President Putin was characterized by its aggressive policies vis-à-vis Georgia and Ukraine, not hesitating to take the risk of triggering military conflicts to achieve its objectives.

Finally, another case is emblematic. It is the one of the predominantly Romanian-speaking Republic of Moldova. This State was also cut up a portion of its land (approx. 10%), following a secession organized by Russian-speaking people supported by Moscow (Transnistria).

It is also interesting to compare the economic results of the two Romanian-speaking countries: Moldova and Romania. In 1990, the per capita income of Moldovans was \$ 917 and it passed to only \$ 2,077 in 2012 (<http://fr.kushnirs.org/>).²⁶ For cons, the Romanians stood at \$ 1,750 in 1990 and reached \$ 7770% in 2012. In the first case, income had doubled, and in the second, it had more than quadrupled over the same period. It is likely that if Moldova had been a EU member such as Romania, its economic results would have been much better, people would have been more satisfied and maybe the Transnistrian rebels would have been more inclined to find a compromise to this conflict.

Conclusion

Europeist and *Euroseptic* approaches bear some relevance. About the relatively good situation in Central and Eastern Europe, the *Euroseptics* such as Václav Klaus are right to stress that the role of EU membership should not be overemphasized. Other elements were actually at work to achieve this result.

It is also appropriate to mention that the CEECs made their accurate political and economic choices before they joined the EU. It is also likely that many of them would have reached some success without joining the EU.

It is also indubitable that the Soviet withdrawal, the end of communism and the German moderation favored the peaceful climate that actually prevails in Central and Eastern Europe. Added to this is that the American presence and NATO expansion also contributed to the overall stabilization.

The *Europeist* approach nevertheless develops more relevant arguments. Membership in the EU had indeed a beneficial effect in order to prevent excesses with adverse consequences.

Imagine how much German economic hegemony in Central and Eastern Europe could have triggered instability if the CEECs did not join the European Union (and also NATO) as rebalancing instruments. Imagine also in the context of the annexations of

²⁶ Ivan Kushnir's research : http://fr.kushnirs.org/macroeconomic/gdp/gdp_romania.html#p1_2

Crimea by Russia and the war in Ukraine what would be today the level of fear in the Baltic States, in Poland and in some other Eastern European countries if they did not have their partnership with other European countries from the Western part of the continent.

Examples of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the Baltic countries also demonstrate that their status as a member State allowed them to depart from temptations that could have had negative consequences for the international environment. EU membership alone does not explain the good results of these countries, but it helps to illuminate why they have been consolidated.

EU accession actually offered a direction and a meaning to countries that were just emerging from periods of dictatorship, which were also economically underdeveloped, politically fragile and tempted by populist solutions.

A comparison of the current situation of the Central and Eastern European countries with that of the States that have not been able join the EU is significant.

The European Union has been instrumental in supporting the moderate forces in the CEECs, while making clear to the extremist groups the price to pay for an exit from the European path.

A comparison of the current situation of the Central and Eastern European countries with that of the States that have not been able join the EU is significant. One has only to compare the situation in Poland with the one of Ukraine, or that of Romania with the one of Moldova.

All in all, the unique contribution of the European Union is to confer an exceptional level of quality to the concept of peace in Central and Eastern Europe. This is not just about a cold peace, a kind of cease-fire, but much more about a firm and sustainable peace. It is here that one can claim that the war in Europe is less likely thanks to the EU, although it is still imaginable and unfortunately not impossible.

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