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Vision

Advocates of European integration are fond of propagating a 'bicycle' maxim: Europe should never stop moving forward or else it will begin to topple. Ralf Dahrendorf, a leading European intellectual and politician, was not convinced by this maxim: 'I often cycle in Oxford,' he once remarked, 'and if I stop pedalling I do not fall; I simply put my feet on the ground.'

Dahrendorf's reasoning may help us in projecting Europe's future after the failure of ambitious integrative schemes. Europe will not necessarily come a cropper; it will probably adopt a more pragmatic, modest and gradual approach to integration. But even if apocalyptic scenarios are not likely to materialize, this does not mean that Europe will remain as it is. The weakening of the EU will doubtless accelerate changes already fostered by technology,

social modernity and markets. Over the next decade or two we will witness a new pattern of relations among European actors; the political geography of Europe is also likely to change and so will the balance of political and economic forces. European institutions will be weaker and European networks will be stronger. Some European states will face competition from their powerful regions, while others will need to devolve considerable powers to large and more prosperous cities. Divergence between European states will also increase, with some resembling failed states while others will be more reminiscent of empires. States will also integrate unevenly: some will join only a few selected integrative frameworks, while others will try to be on board (if not at the helm of) many European clubs and networks. NGOs will become stronger and less territorially bounded. Citizens of Europe will have ever-more multiple loyalties and associations and less trust in traditional communal hierarchies and values. Europe will look like a complicated puzzle without a clear institutional structure, legal order and ideological consensus. Is any kind of integration possible in a Europe of plural political allegiances, overlapping jurisdictions and flourishing socio-cultural heterogeneity? My answer is yes, but we must modify our vision of integration by

embracing genuine pluralism and diversity. I will argue that a more flexible, decentralized and hybrid Europe offers enormous opportunities, and should not be seen as leading to Westphalian anarchy.

The ghost of Westphalia

It is often said that the EU has rescued Europe from the Westphalian condition. As Joschka Fischer put it in his famous speech at Humboldt University in 2000: 'The core concept of Europe after 1945 was and still is a rejection of the European balance of power principle and the hegemonic ambitions of individual states that had emerged following the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.'[1] The fall of the EU could therefore imply a return of devastating power politics and possibly also war. The crisis has clearly reinforced the Westphalian scenario, and so the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, has warned against exploiting the EU's weakness:

> Let me say this to all those who rejoice in Europe's difficulties and who want to roll back our integration and go back to isolation: the pre-integrated Europe of the divisions, the war, the trenches, is not what people desire and deserve. The European

> continent has never in its history known such a long period of peace as since the creation of the European Community. It is our duty to preserve it and deepen it.[2]

Barroso, Fischer and many others use the words integration, Europe and the European Union (or its predecessor the European Community) synonymously. This is somewhat problematic. The Westphalian analogy is also problematic. States were never as equal and sovereign as the Peace of Westphalia had envisaged. Anarchy, hegemony and war are not exclusive features of that era either. No wonder some scholars talk about the 'Westphalian myth'.[3] That said, it is important to query whether the fall of the EU will not bring back the type of power politics associated with earlier periods. After all, recent outbursts of nationalism and partisan squabbles generated by the euro crisis recall the ghosts of Westphalia. In Europe today small states once again fear the domination of large states. Weaker states again conspire behind the back of stronger states and try to form coalitions in order to balance local hegemons. Germany is the most obvious suspect, but Portugal also feels pressure from its large neighbour Spain, Belgium lives in the shadow of France, Slovenia sees Italy as a local hegemon and Lithuania is uneasy about

Poland. Populism and xenophobia are also on the rise with no regional authority to keep them in check. All these developments are indeed disquieting and reminiscent of the most traumatic events in Europe's history. However, history is not likely to repeat itself, for several reasons.

For a start, the EU has not been the only actor assuring peace in Europe: NATO and the United States have also played important parts and so has the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, for instance. Interstate conflicts in contemporary Europe are no longer about territory and borders, but about the shape of European institutions and the abuse of agreed laws. Although European states still have national armies, their purpose is not to wage wars with other EU member states (even though the British and the French, in particular, frequently deploy their forces in different parts of the world). The size of most European armies is shrinking rather than growing, which obviously constrains states' capability to engage in military adventures. The old-type politics of balancing and band-waggoning is virtually impossible in the highly interdependent environment of contemporary Europe, in which security, economic and social issues are fused and unbound.

In other words, the Westphalian brand of politics

is difficult to practise at present and it makes little sense. The modern states of Europe have come to realize that their power and well-being are affected more by the state of their economies and 'human capital' than by territorial acquisitions, aggressive international coalitions and various forms of military adventurism. Can bullying and conspiring really enhance the power of any post-industrial European state? Would Hungary attempt to re-gain territories populated by Hungarians after seeing what misery such a policy inflicted on Serbia? Can European states afford to take each other on when China, India, Turkey and Russia are waiting to take advantage of the continent's internal squabbles?

The euro crisis has undermined trust between states and generated fear and mutual suspicion. Cooperation is more difficult as a consequence, with weaker states more eager to cheat and stronger states more eager to punch above their weight. The pompous rhetoric of pride and glory is again on the rise, propagating national myths and manifesting parochial arrogance. However, this does not mean that we are back to Westphalia. Not all conflicts lead to war, not all national ambitions are about imposing regional domination, and not all interstate coalitions are about dividing Europe into competing spheres of influence. The relationship

between European states has turned sour and chaotic over the last few years, but none of these states are willing or able to practise old-style geopolitics *à la* Metternich or Bismarck (let alone *à la* Hitler or Stalin). Globalization has prompted a shift from nation states to market states, to use Philip Bobbitt's expression; market states have less interest in traditional military expeditions.[4] Europeanization has also transformed states. As Christopher Bickerton has persuasively argued, in contrast to classical nation states, governments of EU member states understand their power and identity as dependent upon their belonging to a wider group or community.[5] This not only shapes their threat perceptions, but also gives them a distinctive social purpose: the need to search for cooperation and compromise in Europe. Even American critics of Europe such as Robert Kagan have observed that Europeans favour peaceful responses to problems, preferring negotiations, diplomacy and persuasion to coercion. As Kagan has cynically remarked, Europeans seem to 'live in a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation'.[6]

I'm not suggesting that war is no longer conceivable in Europe simply because of cascading interdependence and the spread of post-materialist values. What I am saying is that the fall of the EU

will not necessarily make Europeans more prone to violence and coercion. If the EU breaks up in a chaotic manner there might be an outburst of mutual recriminations, but this does not mean a return to 'la géopolitique de grand "papa"' (old-style geopolitics), to use François Heisbourg's expression.[7]

The Westphalian scenario assumes the existence of strong states fully in charge of their respective territories. Those who demand repatriation of powers from Brussels assume that this will make their states strong and sovereign again. They are likely to be disappointed. As Alan Milward's historical analysis has demonstrated, European integration has strengthened rather than weakened states in Europe.[8] The European Community has been an indispensable part of the nation state's post-war reconstruction. Without it, the nation state could not have offered its citizens the same measure of security and prosperity which it has provided, and which has justified its survival. With the fall of the EU the reverse is likely to happen. States will find it increasingly difficult to fend off global pressures, maintain social contracts and defend their policy failures. Other actors, both public and private, are likely to gain in importance and compete for institutional powers and political allegiances. Such a scenario suggests a step towards

not a new Westphalian era, but a new medieval one. But what exactly does neo-medievalism mean for Europe?

The rise of plurality and hybridity

New medievalism symbolizes a break with the Westphalian era, and the failure of its modernist institutional embodiment: the EU. However, it does not suggest a 'back to the future' scenario with a computerized version of the Middle Ages. It only suggests that the future structure and exercise of political authority will resemble the medieval model more than the Westphalian one. The latter is about concentration of power, hierarchy, sovereignty and clear-cut identity. The former is about overlapping authorities, divided sovereignty, differentiated institutional arrangements and multiple identities. The latter is about fixed and relatively hard external border lines, while the former is about fuzzy borders with ample opportunity for entrance and exit. The latter is about centrally regulated redistribution within a closed national or European system. The former is about redistribution based on different types of solidarity between various transnational networks. The latter is about strict rules, commands

and penalties, while the former is about bargaining, flexible arrangements and incentives.[9]

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. This is a trend that has been noted by academics for some time. The expected fall of the EU will only accelerate it and make it more pronounced. In some fields, such as defence, states may well remain the principal actors, but in other fields, such as market regulation, social policy or internal security, numerous local or transnational actors, private or public or mixed, will have a chance to gain in importance. Even democracy is likely to be less territorial with the media and NGOs monitoring politicians across Europe's borders more skilfully than national parliaments.

The projected scenario may sound novel to students of the EU, but not to students of globalization and social change. For years the digital revolution

has been generating major transformations in production, communication, competition and security. The post-modern revolution has generated alterations in our core values, notions of interest and social hierarchies. How many young men are still willing to die for their country? Do many people still believe that states can control financial markets? How many members of parliaments are able and willing to represent the interests of their voters? The EU crisis is a small episode in this on-going historical spectacle, but it is also quite symptomatic. After all, the EU was an important instrument in the hands of European nation states. With no EU to help or blame, they will find it difficult to justify their formal powers, for the legitimacy of these states rested on three pillars – their key provision of welfare, democracy and administration – all of which are now trembling, leaving other actors likely to step in.

For a few initial decades after World War II, European states could legitimate their extensive powers by claiming that they were the only providers of impressive welfare provisions made possible by continuous economic growth. However, these states have seen little growth in the last two decades and the welfare system is now bankrupt in some states and shrinking in others. Unemployment is

rising (especially among young people), and so is poverty (especially among older people). It is hard to imagine any significant economic improvement in the coming years, meaning that citizens' trust in their states as economic agents is likely to be severely tested. With state pension systems in disarray in some countries, private pension funds are becoming increasingly important. In some countries specialized NGOs (civic and religious) have proven more effective in alleviating poverty than governments. The privatization of education and health systems is progressing alongside the marketization of these important services. Access to quality hospitals, schools and housing is now determined more by the rules and managerial skills of large cities or regions than states. New private chains have invested huge funds in public hospitals in Berlin and Hamburg. In Denmark regional governments have acquired extensive powers to organize health care delivery. And there are numerous further examples of states losing their grip over the welfare of their citizens.

States do not perform any better as democratic agents. Even though it is often argued that democracy, unlike the economy, can only be run by nation states with their crystallized *demoi* and workable systems of representation, the state-cen-

tred model of representative democracy, with its formal reliance upon parliaments, parties and elections, is increasingly unpopular and dysfunctional. Public trust in parliaments and parliamentarians is very low following a series of scandals that even affected Westminster, the 'mother' of parliamentary democracy. Political party membership is falling dramatically, while the average age of party members is rising. If it is true that the average member of the UK Conservative Party is about 68 years old,[10] one wonders whom this party represents. Electors can still choose their representatives freely, but these representatives are not free to reverse their countries' policies. Nor is there any evidence that the results of successive elections determine where the power, profits and privilege are located. Even in such a relatively well-functioning state as Sweden, the proportion of citizens who think that politicians have lost touch with those they govern has risen from 35 to 70 per cent over recent decades. Not surprisingly, therefore, non-state democratic representation is being developed in and around various interest and pressure groups, the work-place or the corporation, social movements, clubs and advocacy groups. Local communities are also becoming important democratic actors. Elections to the regional parliaments of Catalonia

or Lombardy are now more crucial for many citizens than national parliamentary elections. Leading politicians run for mayoral posts in such large cities as Paris, London or Warsaw. Elections, parties and parliaments – the pillars of state-centred democracy – are also becoming less crucial to the functioning of democracy. As John Keane has persuasively argued, extra-parliamentary, power-scrutinizing mechanisms led by the media, think tanks or polling agencies are proliferating, constantly keeping elected politicians 'on their toes'. We live in an age of 'monitory democracy' and traditional forms of parliamentary representation are in retreat.[11] As a result, European states can no longer claim to be the only site offering meaningful forms of popular representation, accountability and participation.

States were also said to be the most crucial administrative agents, but one wonders whether this is still the case. In some (chiefly Northern European) states there has been a sweeping privatization, deregulation and marketization of national administrative systems. Agencies independent of the central government have proliferated to regulate and oversee various branches of administration. Public–private partnerships have blossomed. All these reforms have made the state just one of many administrative agencies. In other (chiefly Southern European)

states similar public management reforms have been obstructed by informal corporatist and clientelistic networks. Administration has remained essentially in the hands of the state, but it continues to be politicized, oversized and unresponsive. With public debt mounting, the public administrations have become the prime victims of rather random budgetary cuts, and one wonders if they will ever recover from the shock.

States have also lost administrative powers through the process of territorial devolution and decentralization. The most pronounced examples here are Belgium, the UK, Italy and Spain, but traditionally centralized states such as France and Poland have also decentralized their administration. Belgium, which used to be a regionalized unitary state, has been transformed into a highly decentralized federal state comprising communities and regions. In the UK devolution has led to the creation of separate regional civil services that are involved in policy development. Institutional and fiscal decentralization have gone hand in hand. Local governments have been granted either greater taxing powers or more discretion in using assigned central resources. Moreover, decentralization has gone hand in hand with a new management style giving local governments more choice and

flexibility and reducing hierarchical steering. These developments have encouraged innovative regional initiatives such as the Metropoli-30 network of leading industrialists and politicians in Spain's Basque Country, which led to the successful overhaul of the region's shipping, rail, urban-infrastructure and cultural strategies.

So far, the process of territorial devolution and decentralization has not led to the break-up of any state, but it has produced what John Loughlin has called 'hybrid states', in which central and local authorities share not only administrative but also political powers, over which they need to bargain.[12] The outcome of this bargaining process can no longer be taken for granted, meaning that some states may lose their primacy in European politics. This may be prompted either by secessionist tendencies of such powerful local units as Scotland, Catalonia and Lombardy or by a major governance failure of central administration. (A combination of both of these factors can also be envisaged.) Belgium went 588 days without a formal government after the 2010 political crisis, and the paralysis delayed the structural reforms expected of a country with one of the highest debts per capita in the EU. Italy has had emergency governments since 2011 that lack meaningful political consensus, and are unable

to command their civil service. In the summer of 2013 a political storm ensued after it was revealed that the civil service had deported a Kazakh dissident's wife and six-year-old daughter without informing the Minister of the Interior.

Not all European states are faced with secessionist regions or are as dysfunctional as Italy or Belgium. The Swedish welfare system is much sounder than its Greek counterpart. Youth unemployment rates are alarming in Spain, but not in Austria or Germany. The democratic problems of Denmark are of a different scale and nature than those of Hungary. This means that some states are likely to fare better than others, which only reinforces the argument about the rising diversity, pluralism and hybridity across the continent. States unable to cope with a variety of internal and external shocks would have to share powers with other units, be they local or transnational. Not only the health of individual states will matter, but also their size. The majority of states in the EU are small, if not tiny, and they may face fierce competition from Europe's largest and most successful cities and regions.

Large urban agglomerations and 'global cities', to use Saskia Sassen's expression, are currently seen as the most likely candidates to fill the political and administrative vacuum resulting from the loss of

power at the national level.[13] They have become the greatest beneficiaries of the de-territorialization process generated by globalization, digitalization, privatization and deregulation. Some experts are already talking of the metropolitan revolution in Europe. London, Paris, Milan and Frankfurt are not only the engines of the European economy and the key centrs for trade and investment, but they also progressively assume political, social and cultural functions traditionally performed by nation states. Moreover, they are the sites for global management functions and key generators of technological innovation. They are also key sites of television, radio and press, shaping political agendas and cultural trends. Modern cities operate transnationally through a variety of trans-border networks, often ignoring traditional interstate diplomacy. Their inhabitants are also transnational; large cities host both most jet-flying CEOs and ordinary migrants. Unlike regions, they do not compete with states for territory and cultural loyalty. They are actors from a different, super-modern universe, promoting new forms of management and administration, utilizing opportunities created by a digitized global economy and exploring alternative solutions to social and environmental challenges. Their problems and interests hardly coincide with those of nation states.

At times they join state-sponsored initiatives, especially those envisaging multiple stakeholders and the fusion of public and private ownership. At other times, they work with other cities outside the state-led framework in a mode resembling the medieval Hanseatic League. And yet at other times, they join forces with global markets or transnational NGOs to oppose certain laws or policies of their countries.

Not only subnational actors such as cities and regions, but also supranational ones such as global digitalized markets and free trade blocs will take advantage of the loss of power at the national level. Mixed entities are also emerging in the form of cross-border regions or of what Parag Khanna called parastatals: transnational wealth funds, extractive companies, utilities, administrative and judicial centres, export-processing zones and urban-development authorities.[14]

The developments I've described set out a Europe of numerous complex networks and circles. The relationship between territory, authority and rights is likely to be significantly changed, not by design but as a consequence of governance failure and transnational pressures. As always, winners and losers will emerge from this change, with as yet unclear power and location. Although the envisaged scenario is driven by social modernization and technological

innovation, the system of rule it is likely to generate will be familiar to historians. Plural political allegiances, multiple and overlapping jurisdictions, a polycentric system of governance, cascading cultural and institutional heterogeneity were known in Europe throughout the Middle Ages. The new arrangement may well be more hip and mobile, but it will not be particularly unusual. Will integration be possible in such a neo-medieval Europe?

A new approach to integration

There is no commonly accepted definition of integration. Most students see it as the voluntary creation and maintenance of regional institutions by states in Europe. It envisages comprehensive legal treaties, ever-greater convergence across ever-more policy fields and central steering from Brussels. Europe emerging from the current crisis will only have a few of these ingredients. In this book I have sketched out a vision of weak central European institutions with states either unable or unwilling to give support to Brussels. Plurality, heterogeneity and hybridity will be the norm with no comprehensive legal framework structuring relations among a variety of actors across different policy fields. For

followers of Jean Monnet this neo-medieval scenario heralds the end of integration. However, there are good reasons to question such a conclusion.

Paradoxically, reducing the size and power of European institutions may prove to be a blessing rather than a curse for integration. After all, the EU found itself in trouble because its institutions claimed ever-more powers without a popular mandate. States were not necessarily the best agents of integration. They tried to use the EU for their own parochial ends without committing any significant resources to common endeavours. States also had little trust in each other, and so they generated monstrous treaties and cumbersome decision-making procedures to bind each other. Diversity and heterogeneity are normal states of affairs in complex polities and there is no reason to insist on ever-greater convergence across the vast European space. Diversity is an engine of social development and economic innovation. Diversity, i.e. pluralism, is a pillar of democratic order. Integration recognizing local conditions and rejecting rigid hierarchical blueprints may prove more effective in coping with problems of complex interdependence.

In short, it would be good to envisage a method of integration suitable for the neo-medieval environment. One does not need to engage in abstract

theories of collective action to see that Europeans are unlikely to defend their labour rights, social provisions, health and food safety standards without advanced cooperation. Immigration, trade, transport, energy and environmental degradation are also easier to address through some form of integration. The problem is that the EU has proved not particularly effective in addressing many of these challenges and it has lost public support. It's time to consider a different way of integrating.

What would the proper integration archetype imply, and how will it differ from the current one? Below are four observations that could be called Mitrany principles. David Mitrany's work from the 1940s to the 1970s not only anticipated the current problems caused by 'states-led' integration, but also proposed original solutions for integrating complex, interdependent and transnational polities of the sort that we are witnessing today.[15]

First, successful integration would have to be carried out by multiple actors and not just by states. As long as states are self-appointed gatekeepers of integration, it is difficult for transnational networks to assume any independent role. However, the failure of the EU may well break the monopoly of states and allow cities, regions, professional associations and NGOs to join old, or form new, transnational

integrative networks. States are likely to take part in these networks, to a lesser or greater degree, depending on the issue handled by a given network. For instance, one can hardly imagine a network dealing with Europe's immigration or security without the participation of states. However, non-state actors should be allowed to play a meaningful role in all networks in order to prevent states and their bureaucracies (including the military and intelligence sectors) from cultivating bad habits.

Second, the new approach would envisage integration along functional rather than territorial lines. Different networks could integrate in different policy fields such as trade, energy, human rights, immigration or security. The current emphasis on territory rather than tasks lumps together states regardless of their actual needs and situations. Moreover, it creates an artificial border of Europe with privileged insiders and outsiders who are discriminated against. In reality, different tasks concern a different territory and therefore require diversified spatial arrangements. For instance, some parts of Europe are more concerned with maritime traffic than others. The ability of individual actors to join a given integrative network also varies and should be better recognized by the new paradigm. For example, Ukraine may not be able to join a European network dealing with

immigration, but it may join a network dealing with energy or the environment.

Third, the structure of integrative schemes should be polycentric and not hierarchical. It should resemble numerous horizontal rings rather than a single vertical pyramid. This is because task-oriented integrative networks would evolve without any overall institutional blueprint producing a neat architecture. Networks would have a different scope and shape depending on the challenge they were supposed to address. Networks would have to comply with European and national laws, but no single European centre would oversee them, let alone dictate specific policies. For instance, the Schengen system dealing with Europe's borders used to be independent of the EU, but the Amsterdam Treaty incorporated Schengen into the EU's overall structure. Schengen is now a core part of EU law and all EU member states with the exception of the UK and Ireland are legally obliged to join it. This proposal suggests reverting back to the original arrangement, provided the Schengen system survives.

Fourth, governance of integrative networks would have to be flexible, plurilateral and diversified. This is because different policy fields require different types of membership, different modes of engagement and different mixtures of incentives and sanctions.

Some fields, such as the Internet, are moving rapidly and they constantly require new innovative solutions. Other fields, such as human rights, require clear benchmarks and consistent policies. In the fields of industrial competition, taxation or customs sanctions are more appropriate than in the fields of immigration or the environment, where incentives in terms of training and material equipment are more suitable. Governance in the present-day EU is largely about constructing and maintaining the European centre of authority. The new vision of integration should emphasize problem-solving capacities, and this requires rules that are able to cope with a complex and ever-changing environment.

A musical metaphor may help us to grasp the difference between the current and the proposed paradigms of integration.[16] The current paradigm, which we can call EUphony, resembles what in music is called monophony: a musical texture made up of a single unaccompanied melodic line. The proposed paradigm resembles polyphony: a style of musical composition employing several simultaneous but relatively independent melodic lines. Polyphony relies on so-called 'counterpoints' which envisage the relationship between voices that are harmonically interdependent, but independent in rhythm and contour. Numerous musical lines

that sound very different and move independently from one another sound harmonious when played simultaneously. Polyphony envisages interaction, respect, differentiation and improvisation. A subcategory of polyphony, called homophony, exists in its purest form when all the voices or parts move together in the same rhythm, as in a texture of block chords. However, more loose and simple variants of polyphony are frequent.

Polyphony was initially banned by the Church because of its alleged secular, unruly and thus 'devilish' features, but it became increasingly popular during the European Renaissance and formed the essence of Baroque music. The contemporary guardians of EUphony also castigate flexibility, plurality and differentiation as devilish. States are determined to preserve their monopoly over integration and insist on playing monophonic music. The problem is that their performance over the past few years has generated chaos, or, if you wish, cacophony, and it's time to think about a change of tune.

Conclusions

Europe turned neo-medieval by default, not by design. It was not supposed to be that way. EU

officials and most of Europe's politicians have been promoting an 'ever-closer union' and transferring ever-more powers to Brussels. But when we look around we see cascading cultural as well as economic heterogeneity and citizens' resistance to rule by Brussels. The same officials and politicians who got us into the current mess insist that there is no alternative to their vision of European integration. But their vision did not pass the reality test, and it is utterly unsuitable for the Europe of today. It is time to put our feet on the ground, as Dahrendorf argued, and embrace a new vision of integration.

There is no need to stigmatize neo-medievalism. Neo-medievalism is driven by economic interdependence and technological innovation and not by the demons of nationalism. The threat of a Westphalian scenario of war and anarchy has not been found credible. Neo-medievalism does not preclude effective governance, but effective governance in a complex and differentiated environment will be less about automatic implementation of commands from the centre and more about bargaining and networking among European, national and local actors, public and private. The key concepts of such governance are self- and co-regulation, public and private partnership, cooperative management and joint entrepreneurial ventures. Nor

does neo-medievalism preclude a sound system of the rule of law; however, there will be no one single law maker and court system for the whole of Europe. Clubs or networks responsible for the provision of a specific class of public goods will set up their own jurisdictions to oversee their affairs.[17]

Of course, this does not necessarily mean that Europeans will cooperate, let alone integrate. To do so they will need to be won over by a more plausible model of integration than the one envisaged by Berlin or Brussels. The alternative I'm proposing involves flexible integration along functional lines as opposed to the dogged pursuit of a European super-state. The networks that would emerge from this neo-medieval style of integration will not be fully fledged polities; they will be organizations designed to address particular needs and perform specific tasks. It is precisely these kinds of honed and diverse networks that Europe so badly needs.

5

Practising Polyphony

For most students of European politics the EU is a symbol of integration; to them its demise implies disintegration. However, it is difficult to deny some basic facts: the EU performs poorly at present and it has lost the support of most of Europe's citizens. The EU also seems unable to reform itself. In effect, it became a hindrance to, rather than a facilitator of, integration. In other words, the EU may well be doomed, but this is not all bad news for European integration.

Citizens who have lost trust in the EU are not necessarily happy with the performance of their nation states. Only very few of them ask for the raising of fences vis-à-vis other Europeans. For most, cooperation, rather than conflict, is the preferred option. They also know that a divided Europe is easy prey for non-European powers and global speculators.

That said, a dysfunctional EU is not worth investing in. Integration ought to be given another chance, this time with no EU at the helm.

The problem is that the EU has become too big to fail. Policy-makers may not be happy with its performance, but they are scared of jumping into the unknown. Therefore they keep it on life support, but since the prospect of success is small, they treat the rescue as a low-cost operation. Such a policy of muddling through may delay the EU's imminent demise, but it will not address its structural deficiencies, while creating a false feeling of security and stability. Benign neglect will turn into blind neglect. Moreover, the policy of muddling through is by its nature conservative and hostile to any innovation. The policy rests on the assumption that things are not as bad as critics argue, and serious reforms are likely to prove counter-productive if not dangerous.

Technically speaking, it may be possible to make the EU work. Banks that were 'too big to fail' are now being compartmentalized and divided into smaller, more accountable units. A possible failure of one unit no longers pose a threat to the entire banking system. The EU could undergo a similar operation. There are currently more than thirty European agencies and bodies spread across the entire continent and dealing with such diverse issues

as vocational training, food safety, border controls or judicial cooperation. Most of them have regulatory tasks, but they also provide technical expertise and networking between national and European authorities. They receive some funds from the EU, but they are independent bodies with their own legal personality. Resources and prerogatives of these functional agencies could be significantly beefed up, while those of the EU's central institutions could be downgraded. The European Commission could be transformed into a kind of mega-regulatory agency responsible for the single market. The European Council could concentrate on setting some basic standards of access, transparency and accountability for these various regulatory bodies. The European Parliament, possibly under a different name, could do what it does best, a kind of auditing and monitoring of regulatory agencies with no pretensions to act as a sovereign pan-European representative assembly.

The role of EU agencies has indeed been upgraded over recent years, but the change proposed here is much more dramatic and, for a variety of political and legal reasons, it is highly unlikely that it will ever be undertaken. The European Commission may be down, but it is not yet out; it will insist on acting as a quasi-government for Europe. Powerful

member states will continue to use the EU as a vehicle for their own national policies. Most of the weak member states will keep the EU because it gives them a seat at the decision-making table, however symbolic. The body of EU law would be difficult to amend or repel. In short, the EU will formally stay as it is, but it will gradually lose its usefulness and vitality. It will become an institutional decoy to rubber-stamp decisions taken outside of it. Unless there are some powerful external shocks forcing dramatic changes, a spectacle of false pretentions can continue for a long time. EU leaders will call for another 'reflection period', they will subsequently start a new round of inter-governmental negotiations that will last for many years and in the end only propose some minor cosmetic changes to the existing institutional arrangements. Citizens will not be invited to cast their vote for or against any dramatic options. UK Prime Minister David Cameron has promised an 'in or out' referendum by the end of 2017, but it is not clear what 'out'" would imply exactly.[1] Nor is it certain that the Conservatives will still be in power in 2017 and that any successor government will keep Cameron's promise. If Syriza wins the next Greek parliamentary elections there might also be a referendum in Greece on the issue of membership of the euro-zone. However, one or

two exits from the current structures will not break the EU as such.

This does not mean that the EU will recover and become an effective means for coping with Europe's economic and political problems. Dormant institutions do not solve real problems; they only provide a cover for inaction or for actions that are not seen as legitimate. However, behind-the-scenes manipulation will be disclosed sooner or later by disillusioned whistleblowers. Occasional market failures, migratory pressures, energy shortages or pandemics will continue to batter the continent and will require collective European responses. Political and economic entrepreneurs will form spontaneous alliances and networks to address their specific concerns, be they in the field of transportation, trade, the environment, competition, health or social policy. They are most likely to ignore or bypass dormant EU institutions. Some functional European agencies mentioned earlier may gain in importance and seek further autonomy from the EU. They will begin to operate as clubs and networks, as Giandomenico Majone calls them.[2] These bodies will proliferate in response to new policy challenges in individual functional fields. Some European laws will be formally suspended or repelled, while others will be ignored by transnational networks creating

their own independent jurisdictions. Initiatives to liberalize key economic sectors such as services or to amend rules regarding transport or industrial competition will be coming from clubs and networks rather than from the European Commission. The Commission will be allowed to administer various functional arrangements such as external trade, but it will not be allowed to act as a meta-governor. The European Council will become just one among several other decision-making bodies in Europe. Large cities and regions will have their own meetings and administration to coordinate common endeavours. The European Parliament will be paralysed by internal divisions between pro- and anti-EU parties, and between MEPs representing creditor and debtor states. In short, the EU may not be formally dissolved, but it will become less powerful, relevant and coherent. In time, it will become toothless and useless.

Such a development does not herald the end of European integration; in fact it heralds a revival of integration, albeit in a different form and scope. Diversity will be embraced, and hierarchy will be reduced. More emphasis will be placed on voluntary functional associations and less on territorial governance. States will no longer be the primary drivers of integration, but rather these will be

European cities, regions and NGOs supported or even pressed by firms and citizens. Europe's governance structure will look not like a pyramid, but like a 'junction box' with numerous points of interaction and intersection.[3]

I called this new mode of integration polyphonic, in contrast to the current EUphony or even cacophony. A polyphonic Europe will embrace the basic principles of democracy – plurality and self-government. It will also embrace the basic principles of effective governance: functional coordination, territorial differentiation and flexibility. The current EUphony obstructs most of that.

Defenders of the current status quo are likely to insist that only a quasi-federal Europe is able to punch above its weight in global affairs. This is nonsense. Europe was the most effective international actor in the field of external trade because member states voluntarily decided to pool their resources in this particular functional field. By using their common trade leverage they were able to achieve many political and security objectives. The EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), by contrast, has achieved very little because member states were not prepared to pool their resources in this field. They repeatedly voted against each other in the United Nations, and they carried out most of

their security operations outside of the EU framework, through informal coalitions of the willing, contact groups or bilateral initiatives. The creation of the office of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy or of the External Action Service has changed little in this respect. If the CFSP was useful at all, it was in providing a networking platform for discussing European foreign affairs. But this has never led to a proper European army or a European ministry of foreign affairs.

A polyphonic Europe with no strong centre but a variety of functional integrative networks will not be able to 'bribe' and punish reluctant actors, conduct secret negotiations and manipulate international institutions. This will presumably remain the domain of nation states. However, such a Europe would be well suited to creating institutional structures and setting up rules of legitimate behaviour. It could act as a model power showing other actors that European norms can also work for them and providing incentives for adopting these norms.

Defenders of the current status quo will also argue that a complex system composed of numerous clubs and networks will not be transparent and accountable.[4] They will point to the likely problems of pan-European supervision and coordination. They will be concerned about legitimizing complex

polities and institutional arrangements. They will worry that European clubs and networks will not allow free, let alone equal, access of citizens.

These concerns are justified, but with some important qualifications. First, networks are not 'floating islands' (*îles flottantes*) operating above the law and free from any coordination and supervision. Networks will be subject to the laws of the countries in which they operate and also to their own statutes. And as noted earlier, numerous European laws and regulations are also likely to persist. These laws and regulations would have to guarantee certain standards of openness, fairness and transparency. Second, self-regulation is often a more effective ordering principle than the central rule by decree. Likewise, central commands are not necessarily the most effective in providing coordination and steering; shared aspirations and positive cooperative experiences represent a better foundation of harmony. Third, the size and functional scope of a unit matter; namely a huge pan-European unit such as the EU with prerogatives spanning across different functional fields requires a different kind of oversight and legitimacy than a relatively small functional unit responsible for transport or food safety only. For instance, a failure of a food safety agency to enforce its standards may

lead to the dismissal of its board without causing a pan-European constitutional crisis. Fourth, power in a neo-medieval Europe will be de-concentrated, dispersed, divided or fragmented. There will be much less need for special arrangements to put brakes on the centre because there will be no clearly identified, hierarchical centre to balance and check. Fifth, there are various ways of securing accountability. Complex networks tend to escape formal parliamentary scrutiny, but they are subject to a variety of informal controls that are less present in hierarchical systems. Networks usually watch each other and publicize abuses of power. Networks are also subject to the usual scrutiny by the media and NGOs. Sixth, it is easier to reform individual functional networks than a large multi-purpose institution such as the EU. How many times has the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) been criticized, but left unreformed because European decision-makers linked the reform of the CAP to other complex institutional issues on the EU agenda?

This is not to deny the challenges ahead, but to point out the basic fact that large territorial systems run from a single centre also have their problems. As we have seen in the case of the EU, the centre is often detached from local concerns and it lacks basic sources of legitimacy. One-size-fit-all policies

are not particularly suitable for a complex and diversified European environment. The ability of central hierarchical systems to secure coordination and discipline is often illusory. Of course, it will be important to prevent the emergence of various 'authority holes' leaving certain firms and citizens without jurisdiction and protection. However, the absence of central steering may open the door to more effective, flexible ways of governance recognizing local conditions. Decision-making competencies can be shared by actors at different levels rather than monopolized by European (or member states') executives. Governance in its essence is about the maintenance of collective order and the pursuance of collective goals, but there are various ways of achieving these. Besides, Europe is already a highly complex polity, and a 'jump' towards medieval polyphony would be less dramatic than it may appear. In any case, there is no need to apply stricter standards of efficiency, transparency and accountability to the neo-medieval Europe than to the EU Europe.

The major problem with clubs and networks pertains not to efficiency, transparency and accountability, but to their possible disconnection from civil society. Networks tend to operate in a technocratic manner, but their actions often have political,

if not moral, implications. Who will decide which values ought to be given priority and which policies ought to be adopted? And how? So far, there are no plausible answers to these questions. One possible solution has been offered by Amitai Etzioni: integrative networks would have to engage in moral dialogues which go beyond negotiations of facts or interests and concern mutual perception of the common good.[5] These dialogues can be messy and without clear outcomes, warns Etzioni, but they can stimulate a sense of community without which integration can only be superficial, if not decorative.

It goes without saying that notions of the common European good cannot be egocentric, let alone xenophobic. For integration to succeed, the definition of the common good would have to acknowledge the otherness within and outside Europe. This is the basic premise of cosmopolitanism propagated by Zygmunt Bauman or Ulrich Beck. Tolerant interaction among Europeans is the prerequisite of any integration, and Europeans should also be open to interact with if not embrace other civilizations in the world. Further, if we follow Etzioni's dictum, institutional integration should go hand in hand with moral integration.

These are all ambitious prerequisites, but there is no need to think in absolute terms. Moral integra-

tion is about a normative discourse that recognizes plurality and otherness. It is not about drafting a European equivalent of the Ten Commandments. There is no guarantee that Europeans will simply follow the rational logic of integration in certain fields, but equally there is no need to assume irrationality on their part. Public support for individual networks may vary, but legitimacy is a relative concept, and the benchmark set up by the EU is very low indeed. Abandoning the ambition of an ever-closer union with ever-stronger European institutions and embracing instead genuine diversity, plurality and decentralization may well require a 'Copernican' revolution in our thinking about integration. However, upholding the status quo is not a viable option. Polyphony may be a medieval invention but it is well suited to the neo-medieval realities of today.

Besides, it is important to have realistic expectations of what integration can actually accomplish. Democracy and capitalism have their own problems, and European integration can only influence them in a marginal way, hopefully for the better. Nor can we hope that integration will get rid of international conflicts; at best it can create conditions under which peace and security are more likely. This does not undermine the importance of

integration in cases where it enhances our capacity to cope with mounting challenges. The EU has repeatedly generated expectations that it has been unable to meet. This is one of the reasons for its decline, but, as I have argued here, integration will carry on and it will serve Europe well.