

Theories of European Integration Systematic Reflections

Irina Geanina Harja

"Ștefan cel Mare" University of Suceava, Romania
harjageanina@yahoo.com

Abstract

European integration is a process that involves and combines transferable competences, from the national to the supranational level, in order to create a form of cooperation, both political and economic, that will lead to a united Europe, respectively to the development and progress of the Union. European. This article aims to outline a clear picture of European integration from the perspective of theories that can be considered the systematic roots of the integration process. Within the scope of this paper, related to the research objective, was used both the analysis method and the comparative method. Of the theories of European integration, neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism and constructivism remain the most important tools to understand why states decide to unite their destinies in order to achieve a united economic, political, social and cultural Europe.

Key words: European integration, non-functionalism, intergovernmentalism, constructivism, theories

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1. Introduction

European integration is considered a process through which policies are formed and implicitly established more at European level and which have a wider impact on civil societies, respectively on national governments. EU integration can be more easily understood if one starts from the literature recognition of three of the most important theories of integration, namely neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism and constructivism. Focusing attention on these theories implies a correlation with the theoretical approaches of the three families that emphasize the emergence and functioning of this field: theorizing of European integration. The main concern in this study concerns the creation of an area of understanding of the concepts and theories regarding European integration, by identifying the most important relations that exist between the theories of integration of the European Union. This research aims primarily to investigate the interest for theoretical concepts through which the history and development of the EU is reflected. This assertion must be supported by strong theoretical arguments, but no one can deny the impact that these theoretical reflections have had on the integration process. This is one of the reasons that led me to a brief theoretical presentation of three of the most well-known theories of integration. The next section includes a review of the literature on integration theories, namely: neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism, and constructivism. After that, there follows a section on the research methodology and one that emphasizes the analysis of the acceptances regarding the integration process.

2. Literature review

Rosamund (2005) considered that scholars of the European Union should review the EU integration literature in order to understand the need for supranational governance, thus referring to neofunctionalism, whose thinking was considered a historical foundation in conceptualizing European integration. The theory of neo-functionalism, considered an integration philosophy, was part of the study of European integration in the second half of the twentieth century, being the

result of a social-scientific thinking that made its appearance after the Second World War in the USA. Developed as a theory between the 1950s and 1960s, neo-functionalism, being from the beginning a reflective theory, has been repeatedly subjected to revision, but nevertheless it has a set of tools that are useful in analyzing problems related to process dynamics. of integration, respectively for a series of subsequent approaches that were based on certain concepts. Between the 1960s and the mid-1970s, this theory underwent a major change as a result of the efforts made to apply it comparatively outside the Western European region. In this way, the importance of the factors that have led this region of the world towards a dimension more conducive to the continuity of European integration has been realized. The result was the creation of a complex vision of the integration process and the possibility to offer a wide range of possible outcomes, not only between regions, but also within the same region. At the same time, neo-functionalism must be considered as a constantly evolving theory capable of reform. The status of theory that has been attributed to this current, starts from the imprint it has on the emergence of the Union as a new actor that presents its role on the world stage, leaving neither its capacity for self-analysis nor the attempts to overcome criticism and theoretical obstacles. Between neofunctionalism and the term integration theory there is a legal equivalence that is supported by the ubiquity in theoretical approaches regarding the Union of this current, as well as by the similarity between the predictions of non-functionalist analysts and the evolution of the EU. Also, neo-functionalism sought, on the one hand, to support those attempts to discover the fundamental conditions that influence the integration phenomena in a positive way, and, on the other hand, to promote a process of functional sectoral and political dissemination. The neofunctionalists thus managed to anticipate the importance of the sectoral integration that will lead to the promotion of integration in the other fields. The core of neo-functionalism is given by the use of the term overflow. This concept refers to those situations that have arisen under the shadow of some decisions of the governments to place a certain sector under the authority of the central institutions, which leads to the emergence of pressures regarding the extension of the authority of the institutions in the neighboring political fields. As a result of this decision, European integration was self-sustaining and this led to a political and economic dynamic that influences further cooperation. The essence of the non-functionalist theory is given by the spreading effect. In this case, integration within one sector leads to initiation of integration within another sector.

The most important contribution of the non-functionalists was related to the study of the elaboration of the EU policies by conceptualizing the community method of policy development. At the same time, non-functionalists support the idea that the decision-making process at the supranational level would lead to the increase of the technocratic attributes. The evolution of neofunctionalism takes place simultaneously with the development of pluralism, and because of this overlap it can be viewed as a pluralistic theory that visualizes the transition of politics from the national to the international level.

For a period of time, neo-functionalism represented an integration strategy that registered positive results in an environment defined within the theories of international relations as archaic. The success that the European Union has registered since the mid-1980s (the emergence of sectors of intergovernmental or community cooperation) has failed to give neofunctionalism the glory registered in the mid-20th century. The theory of neo-functionalism manages to ensure a compromise between full integration and the willingness of countries to maintain their independence and sovereignty, respectively between the concept of integration, viewed as a process of formation of the supranational level of government, and that of the national state. This theory offers a coherent, weighted explanation of the evolution of the European Union, being considered, theoretically, the main opponent of the current developed later, namely intergovernmentalism.

The intergovernmentalism proposed by Stanley Hoffmann was developed in the mid-1960s. This concept suggests the idea that national governments are the ones controlling the level and speed of European integration. It is conceptually based on a static approach centered on state institutions. Intergovernmentalism was under the (neo) influence of TRI realism, but nevertheless it managed to reach those particularities that helped it to be considered a unique and at the same time influential theoretical experience within the European space. He appeared within contemporary European political culture as a deviation from the theories of integration, being within the realistic current within the structure of international relations. According to the concept offered by

intergovernmentalism, countries act in the framework of international politics as the main actors. Thus, if neo-functionalism considers integration as the result of competition and cooperation between the main actors of society, intergovernmentalism sees integration as a result arising from the cooperation and competition between national governments. Intergovernmental theory does not agree with the concept of spreading effect that neofunctionalism proposes.

It also rejects the idea that supranational organizations are on an equal footing with national governments. Lynch (1993) and Milward (2000) supported the idea that the governments of the Member States of the European Union played a vital role in the historical evolution of the EU, and not supranational organizations. Through the current intergovernmentalism, the importance of national policies for the process of European integration was underlined. At the same time, nation-states are considered the main actors on the international stage. Intergovernmentalism saw the nation-state as, on the one hand, the main possessor of power, and, on the other hand, the supervisor of the integration process initiated outside its own national borders. In the debates on the future of Europe, intergovernmentalism has played an important role because it has succeeded in coming up with coherent ideas on increasing the degree of cooperation between EU member countries. By participating in the EU, they do not give up sovereignty, because they cooperate in those situations and conditions they can control. Nugent (2010) considers that this control allows all participating states to decide on the extent and nature of this cooperation. In addition, this current benefited from an input of neoliberalism that was to investigate the way of forming the preferences of a state. The unique institutional structure is accepted by the national governments only if it leads to a strengthening of control over internal affairs, respectively to achieving objectives that were otherwise unattainable.

Following the debates that have arisen between the supporters of the non-functionalist theory and those of the intergovernmental theory, it can be said that a new theory has emerged in the field of European integration, namely constructivism. Constructivism has been used as a response to change and transformation. The central arguments that have supported constructivism are related to those basic concepts, norms, identity, discourses and socialization, which are used in contemporary discussions related to issues of international interest (security policy and globalization). The constructivist theoreticians have applied and developed in a relatively short time theoretical tools regarding the European Union, thus managing to bring to the fore the positive effects that the EU has on the governments, respectively on the European people. Risse (2004) did not see in constructivism a theory with substantial implications for European integration, but rather a broader meta-theoretical orientation on EU study. He also believes that human actors are not independent of the social environment or the common EU value system. Within the theories of European integration, social constructivism has contributed, on the one hand, to the development of theories and, on the other, to the development of practices regarding the understanding of the process of Europeanization and communication that highlight the discourses within the EU. The basis of the social-constructivist approach is represented by the concept of identity that models a clearer understanding of the existing interests and policemen at national level.

The idea of European identity is developed among the citizens of the Member States, identifying themselves with the national state, due to the feeling of belonging to the European construction. In addition, constructivist theorists consider that institutions include both formal and informal rules, through which the identities and preferences that are endogenous to institutions can be modeled. Constructivism emphasizes that institutions can greatly influence preferences, identities and behavior. According to Moravcsik (2001), the constructivists failed to provide an empirical understanding of the integration process even though they conceived important and interesting questions, related to the impact that European integration can have on individuals and states.

Constructivists issue hypotheses but, they are not formulated and tested to make a clear distinction between constructivist expectations and their rationalistic equivalents. On the European stage, social constructivism introduced a basic concept, namely rhetorical action, whose role could be identified in the process of extending the European Union to the states of Central and Eastern Europe. This enlargement can be considered the biggest challenge of the EU. The European Union, considered to be a community of free European states, has decided this extension due to the sharing of new values and norms by the new states. Lately, constructivist theorists have adopted a certain

positivism trying to test the assumptions about the propagation of norms and the way collective preferences are formed within the EU. Constructivist studies demonstrate the role that socialization has at EU level (small role in relation to socialization at national level) and the more complex interaction it has with different factors. Jupille and Checkel (2003) created a framework, between the constructivist and rationalist approaches of international relations, to promote integration. They believe that rationalism and constructivism can interact through different forms of theoretical conversation (approaching the scope, competitive testing, succession approach and subsuming).

Starting from competitive testing it is considered that there is a common standard of empirical testing as a criterion for theorizing the policies of the European Union. The theory of social constructivism is considered the newest method of analysis and explanation of the process of European integration. As with the other theories, social constructivism can only be analyzed in the context of the other theories of European integration. Social constructivism viewed as an approach to the study of European integration can be a challenge for more rationalist approaches, such as liberal intergovernmentalism or versions of neo-functionalism. In this case, the three theories, neoliberalism, intergovernmentalism and constructivism, can respond to situations related to the process of integration or its connection with other theories of integration.

3. Research methodology

The study on the theories of European integration emphasizes that the theoretical approaches lead to an increase in the size and horizon of the research, respectively of the reflections on the European integration process. Within the scope of this paper, related to the research objective, was used both the analysis method and the comparative method. From a methodological point of view, the approach can be considered as a qualitative one because it analyzes the size of the interaction between the actors involved, everything being done from a thematic, not a statistical perspective. I have consulted in this regard specialized literature. Thus, it can be said that the collected data can provide an investigation that can be viewed, broadly, from a longitudinal and transversal point of view, and the presentation of this work as observational in nature.

4. Findings

Integration theories have emerged as a result of a so-called contradictory discourse between the two concepts, neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism, considered as predecessors of the theoretical approaches that are interested in different phenomena taking place within the EU member countries. Neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism consider European integration as the result of a process of cooperation between governments and interest groups. Intergovernmentalism explains the specific outcomes of the negotiation and focuses on divergent national preferences, and neofunctionalism links the negotiation results in a longer-term perspective and understands the response mechanism of supranational reform in the face of the economic crisis. Neo-functionalism sees the European Union as a dynamic process, while intergovernmentalism analyzes those isolated historical events, such as large negotiations between EU member countries. Thus, through intergovernmentalism, it is shown that within the arena of the European Union, the national states manage to remain the most representative actors, and the history of the EU represents the sharing or sharing of sovereignty, as opposed to the non-functionalist leading to a shift of sovereignty from national to the supranational one. Neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism are the competing theories and represent the main theories of EU integration. Unlike neo-functionalism, the constructivist theory manages to explain the role of values, norms or identity. Neo-functionalists place more emphasis on integration, a process based on the actors involved, and not necessarily on supranational structures. Constructivism, however, observes that actors are deeply affected by their beliefs, ideas and identity. Also, about constructivism it can be said that it is part of the latest theoretical approaches to EU study, although it leaves significant fingerprints on how the EU is studied, and that it focuses its attention on the most important aspects of European integration. Intergovernmentalism is a theory centered on what agents do based on their interests, recognizing that actors are anchored in a structure, that of power and of interstate negotiations within the Union.

5. Conclusions

Although these theories have been modified and criticized over time, they contain strong theoretical arguments for integration. Through the three theories, neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism and constructivism, it was possible to highlight the extent to which the process of European integration was supported and modeled. Theories provide the tools needed to understand the EU's past, present and future. As European integration continues, these theories will be the basis for understanding this integration process.

6. References

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