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**The Rise and Fall of the European Union:  
Temporalities and Teleologies<sup>1</sup>**

**[Corrections 04/15/2014]**

Historians and philosophers have been discussing the extent to which specific ideologies regarding the understanding of time and space are involved in the writing of history, as a consequence of the “central” place that Europe had attributed itself in Modern history. The idea of “Europe” itself, whether perceived from inside or outside, is by definition ideological or it is a teleological “discourse”, which performs epistemological and political functions at the same time.<sup>2</sup> Whether we consider ourselves “European citizens” or not, we have now a keen interest in trying to understand how the crisis of the “European construction” (or the “European Project”) does affect our representations of Europe as a historical formation, reigniting and displacing the conflicts that it always covered. And we are interested in seeing if a critical review of the teleologies that have been associated with a reference to “Europe”, can help clarifying what is at stake in the current crisis. This will be my general horizon in this Essay. It will lead to no conclusion, but hopefully a better understanding of the problem itself.

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<sup>1</sup> This Essay is based on my Keynote Lecture at the Conference “Creating Community and Ordering the World. The European Shadow of the Past and Future of the Present”, The University of Helsinki, 8-9 June 2013, forming the conclusion of the research project *Between Restoration and Revolution, National Constitutions and Global Law: an Alternative View on the European Century 1815-1914*, financed by the European Research Council (2009-2014). I thank Martti Koskeniemi, Bo Stråth, and Henning Trüper for allowing a publication beside the collective report of the project.

<sup>2</sup> See Bo Stråth: “Introduction: Europe as a Discourse”, in Bo Stråth (ed.), *Europe and the Other and Europe as the Other*, P.I.E. Peter Lang S.A., Bruxelles, 2010 (4<sup>th</sup> printing). Also my essay “Ideas of Europe: Civilization and Constitution”, in *IRIS. European Journal of Philosophy and Public Debate*, Vol. 3, No 6 (October 2011).

I begin with a famous passage from the introductory chapter of John Maynard Keynes' early essay, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919):

“For one who spent in Paris the greater part of the six months which succeeded the Armistice an occasional visit to London was a strange experience. England still stands outside Europe. Europe's voiceless tremors do not reach her. Europe is apart and England is not of her flesh and body. But Europe is solid with herself. France, Germany, Italy, Austria and Holland, Russia and Rumania and Poland, throb together, and their structure and civilization are essentially one. They flourished together, they have rocked together in a war, which we, in spite of our enormous contributions and sacrifices (...), economically stood outside, and they may fall together. In this lies the destructive significance of the Peace of Paris. If the European Civil War is to end with France and Italy abusing their momentary victorious power to destroy Germany and Austria-Hungary now prostrate, they invite their own destruction also, being so deeply and inextricably intertwined with their victims by hidden psychic and economic bonds. At any rate, an Englishman who took part in the Conference of Paris (...) was bound to become, for him a new experience, a European in his cares and outlook.”<sup>3</sup>

As we can see, distinct representations are at stake here: (1) a representation of the historical space called Europe (of which Britain according to Keynes is not yet really a part at that time, but Russia is, without contest), (2) a representation of the conflict that was just terminated by the victory of the French-British alliance (with the decisive help of the US intervention) and threatened to start again as a “civil war” if not settled in the correct way (a warning that proved prophetic even beyond Keynes' anticipation), and (3) a representation of the destiny or fate to which the European nations are jointly tied. This forms a teleology, whose concept is based on some determinant factors, all of which are indeed disputable. Nevertheless, I will take advantage of this great model to try and articulate myself a reflection on the current

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<sup>3</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of Peace* (Introduction by Paul A. Volcker), Skyhorse Publishing, 2007, p. 2.

crisis with a figuration of the “space-time realities” of the European construction in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup>

### **Initial assumptions: extensions of “Europe” and historical cycles**

I work on the basis of two related assumptions. The first is that there is no such thing as a “European space” that is framed in a stable manner, whether it is considered the result of a preexisting cultural identity or the effect of cumulative developments oriented towards the realization of some singular idea. This is not to say that notions of close cultural, economic or political solidarities of the kind evoked by Keynes in his language of “flesh and body” do not make sense at all. But they are expressions and consequences of specific interactions, with which they constantly evolve. More precisely they always express a relationship between Europe and the world, of which it is itself a part, which is both specific and unstable because, ever since a meaningful reference could be attributed to the idea of a European system of peoples and nations, this relationship has been changing content.

There are symptomatic shifts in this evolution, however. One of them – of which we are now experiencing the full consequences – was the fact that Europe had acquired the function of a “centralizer” of the world-system, defining itself for that purpose as a power and a “spirit” (as Hegel would say), and has now irreversibly lost this function. This is what Dipesh Chakrabarty famously called the “provincialization” of Europe.<sup>5</sup> It cannot but appear in European eyes (and probably others) as a *reversed teleology*. But a reversed teleology is still a teleology, or it is an index of its latent contradictions. To perceive “Europe” as a figure of equilibrium between its constituent parts and the rest of the world therefore inevitably leads to critically discussing teleological schemes that are involved in our identifications of

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<sup>4</sup> On “space-time realities”, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *Unthinking Social Science. The Limits of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Paradigms*, Polity Press 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton University Press, New Edition 2007.

the “European space”, the “European history”, the “construction of Europe”, etc. In doing this we will need to make *choices*, knowing full well that any perspective always expresses political concerns and prerequisites. For example, to choose “Charlemagne” as an iconic figure of European supranational government (perhaps ironically, as in the case of the columnist writing Op-eds for *The Economist* under this pseudonym) does not lead to the same “teleological judgments” as choosing the Napoleonic imperial conquest or its antithesis, the Holy Alliance forged by Fürst Metternich, Czar Alexander, and Viscount Castlereagh...

Hence my second assumption: there is a necessary correlation between the choice of certain temporal measures, and the identification of certain teleologies. This comes from the fact that a privileged way of reading “teleologies” in history is to imagine circular processes, where a certain historical configuration can be said to have “returned” to the conditions of its constitution, in order to reiterate the origin or, more frequently, to exhibit its displacement and reversal. This general idea will provide me with a guiding thread in the continuation of this essay. I will envisage *three historical cycles* of very unequal length, of which the current “state of the (European) Union” could be considered the combined outcome. Of course I do this only to launch a discussion, in the full awareness of the fact that my distribution of European time among these different cycles is not the only possible one.

### **The *longue durée* and Europe’s shifting centrality**

The first measure that I select is the *longue durée*, in the Braudelian sense, or the multiseular history of the European power to “centralize” the world around itself, thus making the world, at least apparently, its own “periphery”. Expanding Chakrabarty’s terminology, I will call it *the cycle of “capitalization” and “provincialization” of Europe*, where I take the word capitalization in its different meanings: being subjected to the law of capitalist accumulation, but also acquiring the status of a “capital city” or metropolis of the

world. Dates are of course only allegoric indexes in the case of the *longue durée*, so (without surprise) I propose to imagine this cycle as one that begins with the European discovery of America in 1492, giving the impulse to the construction of the Modern World-System.<sup>6</sup> But when does it end? This is a complex and disputable matter. The anniversary of World War I calls for considerations on the fact that, as early as 1918, it was the United States of America (an offspring of European civilization, now able to settle the destiny of Europe through its military intervention) that had become the strongest global economic power, and after WW II, the US became hegemonic in the geopolitical sense as well (although never absolutely, because there were permanent contestations, not least from Europe itself). This can be seen as a decisive “decentering” of the world. The US hegemony, however, did not expel Europe (or part of Europe) from a place in the core of the World-System. I would suggest an indication *ex post*: the centrality of Europe manifestly ends with the participation of most European nations in the post-9/11 US expeditions in the Middle-East, whereby Europe appears as a supplementary force in geo-political conflicts which are independent of its own actions.<sup>7</sup> This is also, of course, the moment when it becomes clear that “globalization”, as a new phase in the history of capitalist accumulation, is driven by forces most of which are located outside Europe (not only in North America, whose relative “decline” is a disputable matter, but mainly in Asia, and also in Latin America).

Of course I am not pretending to *tell the story* of five hundred years of world history, or to define something like a “principle of evolution” in this *longue durée*. It is fairly possible that intellectual historians with a philosophical orientation will now propose grand narratives

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<sup>6</sup> See Immanuel Wallerstein: *The Modern World-System* (Vol. I: Academic Press, 1974; Vol. II: Academic press, 1980; Vol. III: Academic Press, 1989; Vol. IV: University of California press, 2011), from which I draw constant inspiration.

<sup>7</sup> French neocolonial military interventions in Africa, which have been taking place repeatedly in the last period, could be seen as an exception to this description. I believe that they are driven by two interdependent factors: to resist the takeover of local resources by other imperialist nations (China in particular), and to compensate through a display of geopolitical relevance for the growing ascendancy of Germany on the continent. And they are bound to end catastrophically.

centered on the idea of the “de-europeanization of the world”, which will imitate (in inverted manner) the teleologies of “europeanization”, long dominant under various code names. But not even the development of capitalism would provide such a principle, and in fact it is rather the contingent history of the capitalist world system that could account for the concrete forms in which capitalism has developed in the last five centuries. This should not prevent us from asking a question which becomes a burning issue in the framework of current debates concerning the European Union, concerning the relationship between a geopolitical structure following a “center vs. periphery” pattern, and the historical destiny of *the nation form* (or the “form of the nation state”) as dominant form of political organization and the government of societies, which seems to be directly linked to this multiseular development.

In European modern history, this pattern took the form of a hierarchic relationship between European metropolises and dominated colonies or semi-colonies: a configuration originating in the 16th century, which would reach its perfection only at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with an almost complete “distribution of the world” among European or quasi-European powers. We usually assume that it was an exacerbated nationalism that led to the “catastrophic” Great War (*la Grande Guerre*) in 1914 which, as argued by Marxist historians, found its causes in the fierce competition between rival imperialist powers, thus creating some of the conditions for decolonization. During the classical age of imperialism, *the nations were essentially the European powers*, and the non-European colonies were non-nations, a difference which is an intrinsic part of the so-called “Westphalian order”.<sup>8</sup> Of course, not all European nations were directly or equally colonial powers, but all major

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, this thesis has been defended in the wake of World War II by theorists and essayists from all ideological angles: Carl Schmitt (*The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of Jus Publicum Europaeum*, 1950); Hannah Arendt (“Imperialism”, part II of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1951); Aimé Césaire (*Discourse on Colonialism*, 1950). See Nestor Capdevila, « *Impérialisme, empire et destruction* » (introductory essay), in Bartolomé de Las Casas, *La controverse entre Las Casas et Sepúlveda*, Paris Vrin, 2007.

nations were empires, and (with the exception of some “internal colonies”) Europe as such related to the world as a collective metropolis.

This had several dramatic consequences, particularly the fact that the nation-form became *universalized as a dominant political form*.<sup>9</sup> It was universalized in the “intensive” sense, meaning that it appeared as “natural” or “necessary” framework for the institution of the rule of law, going along with representative political regimes based on elections, and the development of republican citizenship in the name of popular sovereignty. And it was universalized in the “extensive” sense, meaning that independent nationhood became the ideal form of emancipation for subjugated and exploited peoples – with all the consequences that we know in terms of an ethnic imperative of cultural homogeneity and the establishment of sovereign *borders* - a typically European invention that became “globalized” through decolonization in the 20th century. My suggestion here is not that there existed anything like a single turning point in the history of the World System with respect to the “export” of the nation-form. Nevertheless we should consider the progressive “turning” of the nation-form against the domination of the European nations, who initially invented it and used it to compete with one another in the ruling of the non-European world, as a *major trend of transformation* in world history. This was indeed a very long process itself, beginning very early with attempts within Europe itself (since we should never forget that there existed proper *colonies* within the European continent), such as Ireland’s or Poland’s defeated wars of liberation. It became successful on a grand scale with the American independences (in fact complex processes of “colonial decolonization”), to become accelerated and reach its official consecration after WWII, in the form of a new international legal order. This new order, which was reflected in the structure of the United Nations, could thus claim to have realized

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<sup>9</sup> See Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein: *Race, Nation, Class. Ambiguous identities*, Verso 1991.

against Europe itself the “cosmopolitan” ideal imagined by European philosophers and legal theorists as an ideal complement to the nation-form, therefore to be genuinely universalistic.

The resulting philosophical question is twofold, so it seems to me. It concerns first the kind of geo-political pattern succeeding the *center vs. periphery* order (or disorder) when its cultural and economic functions are exhausted: what are the alternatives? Abstractly speaking, one can think of several modes (and it is possible that they are competing among themselves in this moment, just as several modes of constitution of the “bourgeois state” competed in the transition to the “capitalist world system”): one of them is a *de-centering* in the sense of the emergence of “centers” which are “European” in their culture and political tradition, but located outside Europe (as already the Americas); another one is a direct *reversal of the hierarchy*, with the “periphery” becoming central, and the “center” becoming periphery<sup>10</sup>; and a third is linked to the idea that there is no longer any “center” (although there are extremely polarized *zones* of riches and poverty, distributed everywhere in the world), but *transnational networks* or “*assemblages*” of heterogeneous territories.<sup>11</sup> The important fact, however, is that in any of these scenarios “Europe” as a single historical entity (that Keynes called “solid with herself”) becomes relativized, if not irrelevant. And the question is also: if the crisis of the “pan-European” project is the crisis of a construction which was devised at a time when colonialism began to really decline, but was preserved with a mixture of neo-colonialism and adaptations to decolonization, what are the effects on the *forms of European politics* itself (including its domestic politics), or even the effects on *the European concept* of the political, which for centuries was centered on the articulation of

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<sup>10</sup> A perspective advocated, perhaps ironically, by certain political theorists in Latin America: see *What if Latin America Ruled the World?: How the South Will Take the North Through the 21st Century* by Oscar Guardiola-Rivera, Bloomsbury Press, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> This is essentially the thesis advocated by Saskia Sassen in her influential book *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton University Press, 2006).



“class” and “nation”? Perhaps the acute difficulty that we now observe for Europeans to invent post-national forms of political representation and decision-making, and ultimately new forms of citizenship, which are neither purely national nor neo-imperial, are linked to this enigmatic reversal of a centrality that had become incrustated within the nation-form itself.

### **The “European Civil War” of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

My second cyclical measure is the “short 20<sup>th</sup> century”, in the sense of Eric Hobsbawm: beginning with WWI which produced fascism and was also the immediate precondition for the first communist insurrection in history to give birth to a political system of continental magnitude, whose principles are rooted in the history of European social struggles and political ideas.<sup>12</sup> War, Fascism and Revolution gave rise to a division of Europe into antagonistic blocs or camps which continued in a new configuration during the Cold War era. Again, the “end” of this cycle is a complex matter to discuss. Looking into the changing relationships of forces between Socialist and Capitalist Europe, and the varying intensities of the circulation of ideas and political impulses between the two halves, I think that 1968 was a crucial inflexion: it was a moment of simultaneous contestation and upsurges on either sides of the “Wall”, challenging the moral order and initiating a transition from one type of social movement to another in the West, but also featuring the ultimate attempts at reforming “Really Existing Socialism” on the basis of its own non-capitalist principles, which as we know were brutally crushed. This had a price, however, which was not long to extoll: together with a decisive change in geopolitical forces, and the emergence of neoliberalism as a “revolutionary” mode of capitalist accumulation in its own way, it led to the collapse of the Soviet system in 1989 in Eastern Europe, which produced the reunification of Germany, soon followed by the disintegration of the Soviet Union as a multinational construction. A

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<sup>12</sup> Eric Hobsbawm: *The Age of Extremes. A History of the World, 1914-1991*, Vintage Books 1996. See also Mark Mazower: *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, Vintage Books 2000.

competition between two antithetic models of supra-national integration was ended, to the benefit of one of them (the “liberal” type), and a completely new hierarchy of power emerged among European nations.

Rallying Keynes’ prophetic anticipation, historians who reflect on the rival “totalitarianisms” and the conflicts which “destroyed” Europe and forced to “reconstruct” it, have called this cycle the expanded “European Civil War” - however strongly they may disagree on causes and consequences.<sup>13</sup> Provided it is not limited to the succession of WWI and WWII (as in Nolte), but also includes the “Cold War” (as in Hobsbawm and Diner), it seems to me that this designation is apt to indicate the imbrication of national conflicts with an antagonism between communism, liberalism, and fascism: ideologies which, however national and nationalist their practical implementation could be, aimed at imposing “total systems” of social and political life throughout the European world (and beyond). This is not only true, of course, for communism and fascism, but also for liberalism (and it became explicit with neo-liberalism, which is no longer a “centrist” discourse, but essentially an “anti-socialist” construction). The teleological figure that we can associate with this cycle, therefore, appears as a *conflict of eschatologies*, whose vicissitudes are sometimes extremely violent (reaching exterminism), and sometimes “peaceful”, i.e. frozen in diplomatic standstill and a “war of positions”.

Why is it so crucial to take into account this “medium range” cycle, with its specific antagonistic texture? This is the case in the first place because the “origins” of the institutional construction of the European Union are often referred to the perceived necessity of *preventing forever* the return of war in Europe after the collapse of Nazism (which had implemented its own “European project”), or to the global necessities of the Cold War and its

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<sup>13</sup> See Hobsbawm, cit.; Ernst Nolte : *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg, 1917–1945: Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus*, Herbig Verlag 1997. As well: Dan Diner: *Cataclysms. A History of the Twentieth Century from Europe’s Edge*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2008.

rival alliances, or both. That the European Economic Community in the West (the “mother” of the current European Union), and its rival organization in the East (the Comecon), were creations of the Cold War, is undeniable. But, more disturbingly, we need to interpret the fact that the collapse of the Soviet system, where the Marxist economic doctrine had been elevated to the status of a political dogma, essentially coincided with the moment when the European Union itself officially adopted its own economic dogma as supreme law of the political unification, although one of opposite sign: namely the principle of “free and unrestricted competition”. “Unrestricted” is the important word indeed: it strongly departs from the combination of market economy, social policies and “regulative planning” that had dominated the first phase of the European Common Market. I will return to this decisive turning point.

When we describe the “European civil war” as a conflict of eschatologies, we should not understand this as a pure ideological matter. Ideological tendencies are incorporated into a material relationship of forces which, for more than 70 years, took the form of the most violent political antagonisms. This is one of the reasons which explain why Carl Schmitt’s “concept of the political” is still considered by many as extremely relevant to interpret the logic and the “subjective” effects of the European Civil War: Schmitt was not content with describing a struggle between antithetic forces, whether social, national, religious or even racial, but he was analyzing a meta-conflict of the *second order*, which opposed *antithetic manners of defining the “friend-enemy” relationship*, or politicizing the social.<sup>14</sup> But eschatologies which are also political discourses have a tendency to reduce the conflict in which they are taken to *binary patterns*, of the type “liberalism vs. totalitarianism”, or “socialism vs. capitalism”, whereas the fact is that the civil war in Europe was never a binary

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<sup>14</sup> Carl Schmitt: *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (1923), MIT Press, 1988. A recent assessment of the legacy of Schmitt’s thought in international relations is Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations. The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870-1960*, Cambridge University Press 2001, p. 413 sq.

one, neither in its military nor in its frozen diplomatic forms. It was always triadic at least. In this pattern we must also include the disturbing fact that the first form of an *economic and political integration* of modern Europe was attempted by the Nazis. This would make it possible in a sense to explain “from a realistic point of view” that the process of unification was initiated in 1940 with the invasion of Poland and France, not 1947 with the Marshall Plan or 1951 with the Coal and Steel Community...<sup>15</sup> In that case, the post-war transformations would be best conceived as a *revolution* in the history of European unification rather than a *creation*. These are problematic categories with which to deal with the complex legacy of the tragic 20<sup>th</sup> century in the construction of a “unified” European continent. We must not underestimate the fact that supranational political constructions on both sides of the Iron curtain - the Comecon or the European Economic Community - were rival projects made possible by the defeat of the Nazi rule, which oscillated between virtual military confrontation at the height of the Cold War (although never crossing the decisive threshold, in virtue of a Yalta agreement carefully observed on both sides), and “peaceful coexistence” or even attempts at constructing institutional frameworks for the cooperation of the “two Europes” with different social systems (at the time of the Helsinki Peace Agreement and the *Ostpolitik* of Chancellor Willy Brandt).

Why do I find it important to reexamine these vicissitudes of the past century and insist on its critical moments right now? The first psychological reason lies with the “new” problems posed (internally and externally) by the fact that Germany now again enjoys a hegemonic position in Europe. After the beginning of the crisis it has also revived anti-German discourses and feelings, particularly in Greece and other Southern European

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<sup>15</sup> See Mark Mazower: *Hitler's Empire. How the Nazis Ruled Europe*, The Penguin Press, New York 2008. Of course one can think of older attempts, particularly the Napoleonic project of a “continental bloc” under French hegemony (which may have inspired Hitler's plans, and whose mythical memory still feeds British reluctance to give up the sovereignty of the UK within a European supra-national order). But this traces back to a completely different moment in the history of modernity, with a huge discontinuity in the middle.

countries (but not only), invoking the fact that Germany is conducting the neo-colonial policies imposed on them by the EU, such as forced privatizations, selling public land and national services to foreign capitalists, establishing a kind of political protectorate, creating a unilateral drain of skilled manpower towards the center, etc. This situation, which could have destructive consequences, makes it all the more important to distinguish different forms and moments of hegemonic national or multinational power inside the European history in the 20th century, by putting aside every political correctness. It is in fact equally difficult to lift taboos and avoid confusions in these matters...<sup>16</sup>

### **Social benefits of the Cold War in the West and their reversal**

But there is another historical question which seems to me even more important to discuss retrospectively: this is the relationship between the *division of Europe* during the Cold War and the fluctuating *social dimensions* of the European construction. It leads most directly to the intrinsic relationship between the periodization of European politics and the structural divisions in its geographic “space”, provided we abandon the official idea of a Europe reduced to *one of its parts*, or to its “core” region, with other nations and peoples becoming “Europe” only inasmuch as they are progressively absorbed by this “core” and aligned on its institutions. Europe’s *material constitution* was always framed as a dialectical relationship between *all* its parts (including Russia) - an idea that once again traces back to

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<sup>16</sup> The discussion on Germany as “reluctant hegemon” was launched by William E. Patterson in the *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Volume 49, Issue Supplement, September 2011. It was popularized by *The Economist*, June 15<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> 2013: “The reluctant hegemon. A special report on Germany”. Habermas used the category “semi-hegemony” and called it a major obstacle for a democratic Europe. He did not hesitate to write: „it is in our national interest, not to fall again into the „semi-hegemonic position“ with which Germany had paved the way for two successive World Wars, which had been overcome by the European unification“ (“Für ein starkes Europa – aber was heißt das?”, in *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, März 2014). See also Ulrich Beck, *German Europe*, Polity Press 2013. That the discussion is not a pure fantasy is testified by the fact that the most recent German history of WWI explicitly invokes similitudes between the “central” position of Germany in Europe before 1914 and after 1990 (Herfried Münkler, *Der Grosse Krieg. Die Welt 1914 bis 1918*, Rowohlt Verlag, Reinbeck 2013).

Keynes himself. It could be argued in a simple manner namely, that the construction of the welfare state in Western Europe, pushed by a combination of Social-democratic and Christian-democratic forces depending on the vicissitudes of national politics, under the umbrella of the Common Market, was continuously fostered by the necessity to offer an alternative to Soviet socialism, in order to prevent the working classes from adopting a communist ideology.<sup>17</sup> In Gramscian terms, the threat for the West represented by the East (not so much as it was “really existing” than as it was “imagined”) was not so much a military threat than a hegemonic challenge. Of course this would never have produced any result without a pressure of social movements, acting under different political leaderships and ideologies, which took the form of conscious class struggles in Britain, France, and Italy, or reformist trade-unionism in Germany or Sweden. The impulse had to come at the same time from below and from above.<sup>18</sup> But it was also the direct result of the competition with the “socialist camp”. . If we follow this hypothesis, European history as a whole displays a terrible irony: while the Soviet mode of « socialism » generated totalitarianism and, in the end, corruption and economic inefficiency in the East, it indirectly but powerfully contributed to welfare policies and democratic politics in the West.

In this context, I would suggest, we are able to better understand the meaning of the shift that took place in 1989 and after (i.e. when the European Union was officially founded). Already since 1981 (if not before), with the *Solidarnosc* movement in Poland, it had become clear for everyone that the Soviet system in the East was not a “popular” democracy actively

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<sup>17</sup> Antonio Negri developed this hypothesis as early as 1967: see his essay on « Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State », in *Revolution retrieved: writings on Marx, Keynes, capitalist crisis and new social subjects*, Red Notes, London: 1988. More recently the case has been carefully argued for by Albena Azmanova: “1989 and the European Social Model. Transition without emancipation?” in *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, vol. 35 no 9, 1019–1037. For a different interpretation see Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism. The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*, The New Press, New York 1996.

<sup>18</sup> To a large extent its outcome was influenced by “third way” political discourses formed during the interwar period, especially in France, which, not by chance, were influential on the ideology of the “founding fathers” of Europe (like Monnet and Delors). See Antonin Cohen: *De Vichy à la Communauté Européenne*, Presses Universitaires de France, 2012.

supported by the working class. And with the democratic “velvet” revolutions in 1989, every trace of a political challenge on the other side had completely disappeared. During the same period, as a consequence of the advances of globalization and the rise of neo-liberalism, a “passive revolution” was on its way in the West, which deprived the Socialist organizations of their former influence (including the Communist parties), and progressively marginalized them, or pushed them towards the “liberal” center (in fact neo-liberal). It is therefore ironic, but not entirely surprising, that the EU in its constitutive moment (the Maastricht treaty of 1992) was endowed with a quasi-constitution where, for the first time in this part of the world (but not the first time in Europe), a principle of political economy deriving from a specific ideological discourse (namely neo-liberal deregulation and unrestricted competition, believed to produce “optimal allocation of resources” and spontaneously “just” redistribution, instead of state property and centralized planning, once believed by Soviet ideologists to eliminate unemployment and suppress social inequalities) was proclaimed the supreme rule which all member states ought to implement under the close surveillance of the federal (or quasi-federal) organs of the Union. One dogma – the mirror image of the other – has now eliminated its antithesis. And it is really tempting to read here a “repetition” of the inaugural scene that I was recalling after Keynes: the “victors” in this last episode of the European Civil War, driven by interest but also by ideology, prove equally unable to see that a “fanatic” implementation of their own principle after the complete defeat of their opponents could lead to catastrophes... I am of course not suggesting that we have reached the same degree of acute contradiction in Europe as after the Versailles Treaty. But still, I am wondering if a comparison between the “origin” and the “end” of the cycle would not deliver meaningful lessons for our present, with respect to the imbrication of processes which destroy solidarities and foster popular resentment. Today’s Europe is certainly not a farewell to its tragic past, it is rather a painstaking *Durcharbeitung* (“working through”) of this past.

## The European process of “unification”

The third time-measure that we must now take into account, logically, is the “short range” of the European unification process itself, in the post-WWII period, assuming that the various institutional figures beginning with the “Coal and Steel Community” established in 1951 (and “teleologically” preceded by the famous “Schuman Declaration” from 1950), through the Rome Treaty in 1957 which created the “Common Market” (later named the “European Economic Community” retrospectively), to the “European Union” proclaimed in 1992 by the Maastricht Treaty, form a single process. This idea of a linear development however is part of the problem, and I will need to qualify it. Can we already indicate an “end” for this cycle? I submit that this is the case *at the very least* in the form of the following assertion: Europe as a political construction with quasi-federal characters now faces the *dilemma* of degenerating *or* being structurally reshaped, a dilemma which doesn’t have any immediate solution. Almost everyone acknowledges that there is a dilemma, but practically no one agrees on what ought to be done to resolve it.

This formulation tries to avoid apocalyptic prophecies, which give no possibility of political intervention, and can be used as means of intimidation to impose on the national constituencies an economic and political “state of exception” declared to be necessary (in the classical figure of a Schmittian *kathèkon*) to postpone a collapsing of the European institutions. But such a formulation also tries to avoid euphemizing the depth of the current crisis and obfuscating its nature. The crisis had been looming since the mid 1990’s (if not before) in several European countries (not only those which, like France and the Netherlands, initially rejected the “constitutional treaty” offered in 2005, thus prompting its withdrawal).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> To which should be added Ireland after the Lisbon Treaty (2008). In 2005 former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt had warned that, in case the Constitutional Project were submitted to referenda in all European countries, most of them would have rejected it. Many political scientists today agree that the “trick” used to bypass the difficulty (suppress the normative parts of the project and change it into another international agreement) has considerably



It became a properly *European crisis* in the context of the global financial turmoil after 2008 when the “remedies” imposed by the so-called *troika* (European Commission, plus European Central Bank, plus IMF) to prevent an imminent Greek default clearly demonstrated the incapacity of the EU to invent a political treatment for the bankruptcy and the corruption of its own member state that would not produce the ruin of the country and the imposition of a “protectorate” neutralizing its democratic institutions. A similar scenario, albeit each time with specific dimensions, was repeated with Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland (the famous “PIGS”). This was followed by a general crisis of the European banking system, with acute episodes of speculation on the sovereign debts of several countries, where the global and internal financial operators could “play” one country against another, threatening the single currency, eventually producing a persistent state of depression which paralyzes the political institutions of Europe as well.. Since then it has become clear for many Europeans that the post-national construction faces an “existential” problem, which can be resolved only through a new foundation on different bases. However the recognition of these bases completely fails in the political class, not to mention winning an agreement on their orientation among the majority of the citizenry. We have therefore entered a period of *interregnum* in the Gramscian sense, where “the old is already dying, but the new is not yet born”, be it in terms of forces or ideas and programs.<sup>20</sup> This is what, I submit, marks the “end” of the cycle opened in 1949 – granted the “end” itself has no predictable termination. Nevertheless, it makes it possible to ask a question about the kind of “teleological discourse” that was involved, either positively or negatively, in our representation of the European construction as a *continuous process*.

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contributed to the feeling, widespread among the European population, that the EU is a technocratic and oligarchic structure where the ordinary citizens have no say.

<sup>20</sup> I follow Zygmunt Bauman: “Times of Interregnum” (*Ethics & Global Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2012), in using this category to describe the current situation in Europe. Gramsci’s formulation is to be found in the *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence & Wishart 1971, p.276.

One way of addressing the issue is to take the *periodization* of successive “enlargements” of the Union as a guiding thread, because they also coincide with changes in the modalities of its “governance” (in particular the powers attributed to “federal” or “quasi-federal” bodies, such as the Commission and the European Parliament), and hierarchies of nations inside the Union, which form part of what we may call its *material constitution*. The “Europe of 6” could still be considered a relatively egalitarian alliance; the “Europe of 28” is clearly oligarchic, if not monarchic in terms of real power. This is interesting because the dominant idea (greatly enhanced by the last enlargement after the collapse of the Soviet system) is that the EU *must expand* until it reaches the “limits” of Europe as a historical civilization (as if such limits objectively existed). What challenged the naïveté of this idea already before the crisis were essentially the conflicts around the possibility of incorporating into the Union new “peripheries” such as Turkey, the Balkan States or any of the ex-Soviet nations (Georgia, Ukraine), whose “Europeanness” was always defined according to the interests at play. But now the challenge is clearly different: even if we leave aside the possibility - raised at the height of the Greek crisis - that some “failed states” or “failed economies” should be expelled from the eurozone, in order to reduce it to “competitive” and “well administered” nations, the fact is that the EU is *cleaved* into different modalities of participation, different “speeds of integration”, different understandings of its orientation, which are permanent. It is no longer possible to view them as manifestations of a single, albeit uneven, development. The distinction of the *eurozone* and those other states (like the UK) which keep a different currency is apparently the main one, since it is not only “economic”, but also an institutional and political cleavage, which is far from stabilized. This is increasingly true as the ECB (officially an “independent” agency) acquires the status of a *governing body* of the Union itself, in agreement with the quasi-constitutional dogma

that makes monetary stability a *political* goal *per se* and a moral condition for the participation in the community.<sup>21</sup>

### **Conflicts and bifurcations in the “construction” of Europe**

In referring to a “linear” process of integration and expansion which was part of the agenda of the EU, and intimately linked to its “progressivist” ideology, we touch a deep level where the representation of the European construction generates conflicting teleologies. In fact, the crisis has brought to the fore a latent clash between two rival narratives, which always existed, albeit with different capacities to influence the public opinion. One of them is a quasi-official dogma of the European Commission, and it is repeatedly invoked by political theorists who are linked to the “federal” (and federalist) establishment: we can call it the *cunning of European Reason*, after the famous Hegelian model. It relies essentially on a speculative extension of the so-called “Jean Monnet Method” of managing internal conflicts of Europe’s supra-nationalism, also used in their time by other leaders of the European Commission, such as Walter Hallstein, Altiero Spinelli, Sicco Mansholt and Jacques Delors, all of them great experts in developing the common policies and reinforcing the federal character of the European institutions through the detour of their economic or technical necessity, in order to bracket political confrontations that would lead to paralysis.<sup>22</sup> More precisely, it is a question of advancing *occult elements of political federalism*, by overcoming the nationalist resistance of the member-states and their public opinions. This leads to the more general idea that sooner or later, but inevitably, major *crises of the European construction* produce new advances of European federalism. Hence the economic integration

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<sup>21</sup> This dogma is often referred to as a consequence of “ordoliberalism”, as was theorized by German economists and legal theorists, and partially implemented in the German Federal Republic in the 1950’s and 60’s. This matter deserves a careful historical discussion. See useful elements in Michel Aglietta and Thomas Brand: *Un New Deal pour l’Europe*, Editions Odile Jacob, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> See for example Michael Burgess, *Federalism and European Union: The Building of Europe, 1950-2000*, Routledge, London 2000; or Luuk van Middelaar (speechwriter to the European “president” Herman van Rompuy): *The Passage to Europe*, Yale University Press, 2013.

is bound to serve the emergence of a post-national state (or a post-national political construction that is not exactly a state, while appropriating sovereign prerogatives), because it is tacitly assumed that “*economy*” *always unites Europe*, or the European nations or regions (or populations) *cannot have substantially different economic interests*. To this representation another teleology is directly opposed – a “negative teleology” as it were - which can be found persistently among the opponents of the EU from left and right equally: namely the idea that a “post-national Europe” was always already the perverse “plan” of its founders and driving forces (transnational capitalists and Atlantic politicians in particular) to destroy the nations and subjugate the peoples, as if inscribed in “the genome” of the European Union.<sup>23</sup> For that reason defenders of the national sovereignties or critics of the social and regional polarization that, following the trends of globalization, Europe now increasingly produces within its own borders, conclude that there is no other alternative to the destructive forms taken by Europe’s economic orthodoxy than to abolish the construction itself (sometimes it is “simply” a question of abolishing the single currency system: but since the *euro* now belongs to the hard core of the federal or neo-federal construct, it amounts exactly at rejecting the post-national project.)<sup>24</sup>

I will not discuss these two symmetric representations in detail, but I want to emphasize that they share a notion of *necessary development*, which in one case would be dialectical and *a posteriori*, and in the other case intentional and *a priori*. For this reason, an alternative (which is the path that I try to illustrate here and in other writings)<sup>25</sup> lies in the

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<sup>23</sup> This “genetic” scheme is insistent in the recent volume *En finir avec l’Europe*, edited by Cédric Durand, La Fabrique Editions, Paris 2013, which contains interesting « Marxist » analyses on the dependency of the European construction with respect to financialized capitalism (by Costas Lapavistas in particular).

<sup>24</sup> An eloquent presentation of this argument : Wolfgang Streeck : *Gekaufte Zeit: Die vertagte Krise des demokratischen Kapitalismus*. Suhrkamp, 2013 (engl. transl. *Buying Time - The Postponed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* , forthcoming with Verso editions). See also Jacques Sapir, *Faut-il sortir de l’euro?*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> See my article: “Un nouvel élan, mais pour quelle Europe?”, *le Monde Diplomatique*, mars 2014.

possibility of identifying *real discontinuities* in the contingent history of the European construction: not only at the level of projects, but at the level of policies and practices, in relation to the transformations of the European society and its articulation to global changes. Whether such discontinuities ever reached the point of actual *bifurcations*, alternative routes that could be taken without a pre-determined choice, so that the current configuration of the Union had a relatively *contingent* character, is a difficult question. But it is clearly a vital one, to be discussed with the help of historians of the European institutions and society, since what we can call “project” was never just a blueprint, but involved an implementation of political decisions with social effects. As was already the case for Europe’s territorial extension and cultural identity, this leads into the crucial problem: how to understand changes between successive *phases* of the European construction, partly due to internal processes, partly to dramatic changes in the international environment. And I will hypothesize that the two issues concerning the recent cycle of European construction: internal “cleavages” of the European space, and “bifurcations” of its political history, are in fact not really independent. They form the two sides of a single dialectic, which remains open to new developments, but has already reached a turning point or a point of bifurcation.

### **Three phases and the turning points**

If it is the case that a deterministic narrative and the idea of a “free” project inspired by peaceful, cosmopolitan or industrial ideals, are equally untenable, the European construction as an open process must have taken place in the framework of rigid constraints, both economic and geo-political, while reflecting a relationship of social forces within each country and transnationally, which was continuously changing over time. And each change offered possibilities of bifurcation as much as it imposed a transformation of the project. Successive broadenings of the European space are a symptom of these transformations rather than a cause, even if they impose additional constraints. If there is something like a

“European society”, which indeed is a stratified and unequal society, as some sociologists would claim (e.g. Ulrich Bielefeld), it is now miles away from what it was in the 1960’s.<sup>26</sup> Some of these changes have had dramatic consequences on the working of the European political system, which we may assume now is a reality, if not a success either from the functional or from the democratic point of view.

One such change is a progressive dissolution of the working class as a social group, organized through trade-unions and political parties or associations. But it is also the case in a different manner for the bourgeoisie: what we may call the capitalist class today (which is certainly a very diversified group) is no longer really a “national” group. It has not become a “European” bourgeoisie for all that: rather, it is increasingly “globalized” and “de-territorialized”, as are the operations of financial capital themselves.<sup>27</sup> The fact that the most precarious part of the working class in Europe is largely made of migrant workers or their children, also illustrates the effects of globalization on the social structure of European society. But it certainly creates no solidarity or common ground with the transnational capitalists... Such ongoing social transformations remain continuous evolutions, however, whereas I want to insist on the *political turning points* and the *antithetic character of phases* within the European trajectory.

Historians of the European construction, whether they believe in the idea of the “Cunning of the European Reason” producing a federal construction out of unwilling economic common interest (like Bino Olivi or Michael Burgess), or they defend the idea that

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<sup>26</sup> See his Essay „Von Gemeinschaft zu Gesellschaft: Bemerkungen zu einer Theorie europäischer Vergesellschaftung“. In: Monika Eigmüller (Hg.): *Zwischen Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft. Sozialpolitik in historisch-soziologischer Perspektive*, Beltz Juventa, 2012. A full book by Ulrich Bielefeld on this theme is expected.

<sup>27</sup> This is revealed to the public through the “delocalization” of industries and firms, the speculative activities of hedge-funds, but also the generalization of tax-evasion, now a “normal” system of accumulating financial patrimony. On the importance of “shadow banking” in contemporary capitalism, see in particular Nouriel Roubini, *Crisis Economics A Crash Course in the Future of Finance*, Penguin Press, 2010.

the European construction is about the preservation of nations in a new historical era (like, famously, Alan Milward followed by Perry Anderson), all roughly agree on the idea that the three phases in the history leading to the current EU coincide with the three successive “geometries” of Europe: the “small” Europe of 6 members (phase A), the “middle” Europe of 9 to 12 members in the 70’s and 80’s (phase B), the “large” Europe of 25 and 27 members after 1990 (phase C).<sup>28</sup> Less clear, however, are the structural transformations that took place between each phase.

In my view, it is important here not only to correlate the first great turning point with the consequences on the European construction of the global “oil shock” in 1973 (and also the American decision to modify the international monetary system in 1971), but to view the 68 events as a decisive political and cultural component of the change. To be sure, 68 is a global phenomenon itself: this highlights once again the articulation of internal and external factors in the European history. After 68, as a consequence of its challenging “authoritarian” forms of industrial management as well as family or academic life (“culture”), Western capitalism progressively left “Fordism” which had been associated with a relative equilibrium of class forces under the umbrella of “Keynesian” economic policies. It invented innovative forms of “individualized” job management, intensifying exploitation and destroying job stability while seemingly enhancing the personal responsibility of workers and employees, thus destroying the classical forms of class solidarity in and around the factories.<sup>29</sup> But it was also as a consequence of 68 that new critical social movements and forms of internationalist consciousness became possible. If we agree on this correlation of antithetic aspects, we understand why the “intermediary” phase (B) is so contradictory. This is really, it seems in retrospect, the moment in which alternative routes were presented to the public, but

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<sup>28</sup> Bino Olivi: *L'Europe difficile. Histoire politique de la communauté européenne*, “Folio”, Editions Gallimard, 1998; Michael Burgess, cit.; Perry Anderson, *The New Old World*, Verso 2009.

<sup>29</sup> See Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Verso 2005.

eliminated in the end. Several elements are worth recalling here. Many of them are strangely forgotten or obliterated in the contemporary discussions, and there are good reasons for that, since they highlight the fact that every historical phase contains alternative possibilities (even if political forces to exploit them are not always there). A contingent result retrospectively creates the appearance of its own necessity.

What strikes us now in phase B, between 1968 or 1973 and 1989-1990, is the fact that the question of the division of Europe was not addressed uniquely in the form of an integration of the Eastern part of Europe into the Western part in the “subaltern” form that we have observed after 1990. This was the time of a relative *détente* in the Cold War, with the US in a difficult situation in Vietnam, which made it possible for alternatives to “Atlantic Europe” to emerge either from atop with Chancellor Willy Brandt’s *Ostpolitik*, or from the bottom with the campaigns for nuclear disarmament (END) and the Helsinki Initiative of citizens developing on both sides of the wall.<sup>30</sup> What Mikhail Gorbachov would later call the “common house of Europe” seemed to acquire a certain momentum - unless it displayed its utopian character, since it was precisely the moment in which the Soviet bloc was “freezing” itself in absolute conservatism and collapsing from the inside. And the official West controlled and disciplined by NATO worked hard to eliminate, recuperate, or deviate via terrorism and counter-terrorism the innovative forces that had started to imagine a different future than capitalist accumulation.<sup>31</sup>

But even more important was the fact that, in the new division of powers between the nation-states and the federalist forces, the European Left revealed its incapacity to create a

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<sup>30</sup> E.P. Thompson, Mary Kaldor and others, *Exterminism and Cold War*, Verso 1982 (includes my own essay “The Long March for Peace”). On the understanding of German unification by Chancellor Willy Brandt as a possible consequence of a compromise between the two blocks rather than a victory of one of them, see the memoir of his son, historian Peter Brandt: *Mit anderen Augen. Versuch über den Politiker und Privatmann Willy Brandt*, Bonn 2013.

<sup>31</sup> It is worth asking here again: who manipulated the terrorist groups “Die Rote Armee Fraktion” and “Brigate Rosse”, to kill these possibilities together with the strategy of Eucommunism, which of course had its own weaknesses?



new historic horizon for emancipation or develop campaigns for equality and solidarity beyond the limits of the nation-states where traditional social movements and class struggles had become entrenched. The capitalist managers massively used the weapon of industrial “delocalization” to disintegrate the Trade Unions, who proved unable to join forces and organize a transnational resistance. And the “new left” movements (ecological, feminist, “no-global”, libertarian) which relied on transnational solidarities, remained elitist and mainly uninterested in the European perspective. On the other hand, at the level of governments, Mitterrand and Kohl had replaced Giscard and Schmidt as virtual “governors” of Europe, with a decidedly more *souverainiste* agenda. As a consequence, the project of a “social European policy”, a counterpart of the single currency that had been advocated by social-liberal politicians like Delors, was defeated even before the German reunification, and “Social Europe” was relegated to the dustbin of European policies.<sup>32</sup> After the global turn of 1989, in the framework of an accelerated financial globalization, with “unrestricted competition” working as the Trojan horse of nationalism and speculation within the limits of the EU itself, it was decidedly too late for a Europe of solidarities and democratic transformations to crystallize.

The deeply heterogeneous and antagonistic “union” that we observe today is a result of this relationship of forces established over several decades, even before it was manifested in the open through the antithetic consequences of the crisis for “creditor” and “debtor” states. Different types of antagonisms are now steadily growing in Europe, bearing dangerous consequences for its political system: vast inequalities among classes and generations (with mass unemployment affecting primarily young citizens of the South), regional antagonisms splitting the nations themselves, and pitting the “rich” against the “poor”. It is not

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<sup>32</sup> On the crucial transformations of the European project and the elimination of its social dimensions, see in particular Robert Salais: *Le Viol d'Europe. Enquête sur la disparition d'une idée*, Presses Universitaires de France, 2013.

exaggerated to say that a *North-South division of Europe* is replacing at the “end” the *East-West division*, with which the contemporary cycle had begun, although based on quite different principles and rules: not military, diplomatic, and ideological, as during the Cold War, but economic, financial... and diversely ideological. Cleaving Europe in an increasingly violent manner - but also *tying* its nations together in a conflicting unity - is no longer a wall, but a “prosperity gap” (*Wohlstandsgefäll*)<sup>33</sup> and a unilateral flow of resources, which is reflected in a structure of political domination mixing the hegemony of one state (Germany) with technocratic rule from “Brussels” and a quasi-sovereign function attributed to the Central Bank. Perhaps the continued reflection on the “strange accumulation” of contradictions – as Gramsci would say - which led to this (no doubt provisional) result will help us imagining a common, and different, issue. At the end of three historical cycles, do we have any other choice?

**Abstract:**

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<sup>33</sup> « Prosperity gap » (*Wohlstandsgefäll*) is a concept created by German sociologist Georg Vobruba to describe North-South divides in the Global arena, now being replicated within Europe: see his contribution to the current discussion on the future of the EU “A complex conflict constellation : distributional conflict in the euro crisis” (18 August 2012) (<http://www.opendemocracy.net/georg-vobruba/complex-conflict-constellation-distributional-conflict-in-euro-crisis>).