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## BUILDING THE UNION: AN EVOLUTIONIST EXPLANATION

Fulvio Attinà

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## Building the Union: an Evolutionist Explanation

Fulvio Attinà

### Abstract (it)

Lo scritto indaga sul sistema politico europeo attraverso la promozione e l'analisi del processo di integrazione europea inteso come sviluppo politico. Tale processo è infatti intimamente legato allo sviluppo del sistema politico globale e propone di valutare l'ipotesi che la dinamica dell'integrazione europea si conformi a un modello di evoluzione del sistema globale. In sintesi, il messaggio di questo *paper* è il seguente: l'integrazione non è un processo casuale, maturato irregolarmente grazie a vantaggi dettati dall'interesse e programmi utilitaristici così come percepito dai governi e dalle organizzazioni; è, invece, (a) legato alle strutture e ai processi politici, economici e culturali che si sviluppano a livello mondiale che (b) si è altresì realizzato grazie alla possibilità di apprendimento degli attori interessati.

### Abstract (en)

The paper aims at enlarging the study of the European political system by promoting the analysis of the European integration process as a process of political evolution. It assumes that this process is intimately linked to the evolution of the global political system, and proposes to assess the hypothesis that the dynamics of the European integration process conforms to an evolutionary pattern which is tied to the evolutionary process of the global system. Briefly, the message of the paper is the following one. Integration is not a casual process that erratically developed thanks to the varying utility and interest advantages as perceived by governments and organized groups; it is, instead, a process (a) tied to political, economic and cultural structures and processes that develop at the world level, and (b) stirred by the learning capability of concerned actors.

### Keywords

EU political development - Evolutionary world politics - European integration theory.

# BUILDING THE UNION: AN EVOLUTIONIST EXPLANATION

di Fulvio Attinà

*Sommario:* 1. Introduction.- 2. Evolution and the study of political systems.- 3. European integration as evolutionary process.- 4. Europe and the phases of global political competition.- 5. Concluding remarks.- References.

## 1. Introduction

The European integration process - created to turn the national markets into one large market for the sake of fostering economic growth, and also to turn recurrent violent conflict relations into durable peaceful relations among the member countries in view of building in the long term their political unification - has developed on an evolutionary course punctuated by negotiation rounds aimed at adapting the initial project to the changing conditions of the domestic and international environment of the participating states. The incessant adaptation of the initial design to new conditions has been stirred by national governments and concerned actors like the European Commission, the political parties of the member states and party groups of the European Parliament, and a number of opinion groups and interest organisation. In informal talks, these actors scrutinized alternative designs, and in institutional fora, like the IGCs, these actors agreed on the selection of the *better off* strategy to reform the integration project on consideration of the past experience and the current perception of new problems.

## 2. Evolution and the study of political systems

This view of the development of the European integration process as driven by the ability of the involved actors to make common decisions by learning from past experience in selecting new options of cooperation and integration, is inspired by the evolutionist analysis of social systems. In particular, it is taken into consideration the evolutionary world politics model created by George Modelski (1996) in his long-term analysis of the political institutions of the global system. Political science of today doesn't pay much attention to the evolutionist change of political systems. Impulse, given to the analysis of the formation and development of the European states by scholars like Anderson (1974), Rokkan (1970) and Tilly (1975) in the 1970s, has been gradually abandoned by political scientists. At the exception of the debate on the structure-agent relationship, which has been proposed by the scientists of the structurationist approach to social analysis, the problem of the evolution of political systems does not attract political scientists. Many of them are concerned with the study of the impact of globalization on the nature and functions of the state, but few of them make in depth studies of the process of adaptation of the state to the new environment. In harmony with this perspective, the study of EU politics is dominated by the analysis of the Europeanization of national public policies which is focused on the narrow aspect of the convergence of national policies, and abstains from the macro-level analysis of the evolutionary change of the European political institutions. However, some analyses – like, for example, those by Bartolini (2005), Ferrera (2005), Majone (2005), and Zielonka (2005) – echoing the “grand theory” interpretations of the 1960s and Milward's (2000) attention to global processes, acknowledge the importance of the external pressure on the integration process. Still, the analysis of this pressure remains mostly underdeveloped also in their research work. Briefly, only domestic factors attract the attention of the large majority of political scientists concerned with the study of the European integration process.

This paper aims at enlarging the study of the European political system by promoting the analysis of the European integration process as a process of political evolution, and assumes that this process is intimately linked to the evolution of the global political system. In such a perspective, it proposes to assess the hypothesis that the dynamics of the European integration process conforms to an evolutionary pattern which is tied to the phases of the politics and change of the global system, which also undergo an evolutionary process of change.

The model of social evolution designed by George Modelski defines a four-phase cycle of political change. In brief, the four phases can be presented as it follows. In the *execution* phase, the actors that prevailed on the others in the macro-decision phase of the previous cycle put in place their strategy aimed at solving shared problems by means of common political actions, mechanisms and institutions. In the *agenda-setting* phase, the system actors increasingly disagree among themselves on the management of the common problems by using the institutional mechanisms and political actions of the existing strategy, and propose new contending agendas, i.e. new arrays of problems and problem-solving policies and mechanisms. In the *coalition-building* phase, actors line up and form opposite groups to sustain their preferred agenda, and prepare for competition on the selection of the new global agenda. In the *macro-decision* phase, a coalition of actors prevail on the others after a confrontation that has been played in compliance with the existing rules of the game, and impose the new strategy and institutions aimed at solving the problems set on the political system by the economic, social, cultural and technical environment.

For the sake of brevity, this paper does not discuss the long-term analysis of world politics of Modelski who discerns the regular pattern of the evolution of the global political system, i.e. the approximate one-century-long four-phase cycle of global political competition (see Table 1).

Table 1: The political competition phases of the contemporary world system

Execution	Agenda-setting	Coalition-building	Macro-decision
			1914-1945
1945-1973	1973-2000	2000-2026	2026-

It is tentatively assumed here that the European integration process is tied to the global system process of change. Synchronization is explained by the same starting event, i.e. the two World Wars which are taken as the macro-decision phase that gave birth to both the contemporary cycle of world politics and the European political system.

### 3. European integration as evolutionary process

Let me give for known the social, economic and cultural conditions that, at the mid of the past century and also earlier than that, put the European states in front of the problem of coordinating their political strategies, and in front of the need for building a common policy. At the end of the Second World War, they opted for starting a process of change of their political values, institutions and practice in order to adapt themselves to the change of politics, economics and culture of the domestic and world environment of the time. The adoption of a strategy to tackle the change of the environment, however, does not take place once and for all, but repeats over time in order to cope with new environment challenges. For this reason, learning must be taken into account to understand the behaviour of the political and social actors engaged in the European integration process. Indeed, under the pressure of social, economic and cultural change, the European integration process advanced thanks to the ability of governments and actors (like the Community and government officials, and the business and organized social groups) to reinvent solutions apt to cope with the change of the environment conditions. Those people, however, neither shared the same vision of the environment conditions nor of the project of adaptation of the European system to the new environment. Therefore, the common political space they have built in Europe is marked by the attributes of the multiple visions and strategies of development. At the same time, this diversity is under the pressure of convergence in order to cope efficiently with the need to answer to the challenges of the environment. For this reason, those actors are used to come to fair agreements in macro-decision conferences.

The hypothesis of the relationship between the European integration process and the evolution of the global political system is briefly investigated in the remaining part of this paper.

It is maintained that the world system that borne from the two world wars is an institutionalized hegemonic system (see, for example, Puchala, 2005). The war-winning coalition of states that was led by the United States recognized that the world was that increasingly interdependent unit the

functionalist scholars, like Mitrany, had uncovered by studying the formation of the growing number of international organisations in the first part of the twentieth century. Therefore, the structure of government of the world system was founded on institutions like the United Nations, the IMF and World Bank, and the GATT trade regime. In the same vein, six European states came to the conforming decision of building a set of international institutions to manage their interdependence problems. Furthermore, to match the new institutions to the requirements of their tradition of democracy and welfarism (i.e. expansion of the public domain), they gave to the common institutions a formal democratic structure (i.e. a system of imperfect but fairly balanced control mechanisms among the “supranational” institutions) and gave to these institutions a set of competences expandable to various public policies. However, they selected a small set of policies, i.e. the custom union and the trade, agriculture, and transportation policies to make the integration process start its course.

After the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (1952) and European Economic Community (1957), two decisive turning points mark the history of the European integration process, i.e. the 1969 Summit of the Heads of state and government in The Hague, and the 2002 birth of the Euro and the EMU together with the decision to enlarge the Union to the Eastern and Central European states. Hence, it is maintained here, and briefly assessed in the remaining part of this paper, that after the macro-decision phase that brought into being the integration process, this process passed throughout two phases that broadly overlap the two phases of the global political evolution. It is asserted here that this match is explained by the same set of structures and processes although some other factors are specific to each system. On the belief that the world system is dominant, here it is put under examination the hypothesis that processes at the global system level explain the course of the evolution of the European system, and that domestic factors play a concurrent role, which sometimes either makes the development pace slower or slightly modifies the trajectory line of the change within pre-defined borders.

#### **4. Europe and the phases of global political competition**

In the *execution phase* of the American-led strategy of solution of the global problems, i.e. approximately from 1945 to the early 1970s, the world was organised by political and economic institutions and regimes, and governed by means of rules and policies inspired by liberalism and multilateralism. Functional cooperation was promoted by regional arrangements like the OCDE, and universal organisations like the UNCTAD. The Soviet Union challenged the American-led structure of government of the world system by supporting political opposition in countries of different areas of the world, but was unable to build up successful strategies to oppose the liberal market strategy that the Western coalition imposed on the organization of the world economy. To better direct their economic growth in the capitalist market and avoid reciprocal competition, the West European states, i.e. the Six original members of the European Community/Union, firstly resorted to custom union and common external trade policy to prop up the project of deepening integration in the economic and political sphere. All along the phase of execution of the war-winning coalition strategy, the integration process developed and achieved its primary goals, i.e. economic growth and political accord in Europe. As a matter of fact, strife among the European Community member states was mainly the effect of strains stemming from the world system like the mounting deterioration of the world monetary system caused by the dollar-gap, the international security problems caused by the nuclear armaments race and the bilateral (i.e. Soviet-American) negotiation of non-proliferation agreements, and the issues of the relations with the states borne out from the de-colonization process. However, in 1971, these global problems pushed the European leaders to issue a declaration on the existence of the *European identity* in world affairs, a task made urgent also by the Middle East and oil price crisis. It is reminded here also that the 1969 Hague Summit gave impulse to the deepening of the integration process by starting negotiations on monetary coordination, foreign policy harmonization, and the consequent upgrade of common policies and institutions that gave place to the budget reform (with the earliest enlargement of the powers of the European Parliament) and the widening and deepening of sectoral policies.

De-legitimation of the American leadership on the structure of government of the world system marked world politics in the next thirty years of the *agenda-setting phase*, i.e. approximately from the early 1970s to the end of the century. Disorder broke in and hurt the world economy with the collapse of the Bretton-Woods monetary regime while the rules of the world trade regime had to be repaired time and again by long and difficult negotiations. The crisis of the financial order and the fierce competition of the Western economies among themselves and between them and the new industrializing countries lasted until the 1990s, when private and institutional economic actors introduced neo-liberalism and de-regulation (the so-called *Washington consensus*) as the new foundations of the so-called *globalisation economy*. Regional blocs were acknowledged as one of the most effective way the national economies can make use of in order to overcome the risk of decline that comes from lack of the economy of scale. In these conditions, the Jacques Delors' call for the single market and, later, the single currency was both effect and cause of the success of economic regionalism in the world. The President of the Commission was keen in pressing all actors in Europe to recognize the threat of the decline of the European economies, and to counteract it by adopting the consistent strategy of the Single Market and the Economic and Monetary Union in order to make a great step forward in economic and political integration. On turn, the EU reinvigorated economy became the firm example of the usefulness of regional economic cooperation also to other state and private actors of different parts of the world.

Those steps forward of the European economic integration were complemented by the institutional and procedural improvements contained in the so-called reform treaties (i.e. the Single European Act and the following treaties up to the Nice Treaty). These reforms were needed to make the deepening of integration easier and swifter, and also to make the Union more democratic and transparent in order to strengthen the common identity of the Europeans. By calling attention to this process, I contend the view that common identity is insurmountable condition to political unification, and maintain the view that perception of external challenges, unanimously agreed by political leaders and shrewdly communicated by them to the public, can explain the furtherance of integration in the 1990s.

Briefly, external challenges (i.e. the disaster of the world wars and the uncertainties of the post-war world) explain the demand for integration and the decision of the Six to start the integration process, while the risk of economic decline in the *globalisation economy* explains the demand for deepening economic integration and more political unification in the late 1980s and 1990s.

External challenges account also for the deepening of the common policies in the foreign/defence and domestic security sectors. Regarding CFSP/ESDP, it is briefly asserted here that, on the one hand, the volatility and de-alignment of international politics in the agenda-setting phase and, on the other hand, the reshuffling of the global agenda in agreement with the formation of the new public domain of the world system, pushed the European governments to differentiate themselves from the United States in world politics but did not remove the perception of the advantage (rooted in the domestic interest of all the member states) of being part of the dominant coalition of the world structure of government. Regarding cooperation in justice and domestic security, it is briefly reminded here that this common policy started in the 1970s to face the threats of European terrorist and transnational crime groups to domestic security, but deepened in the last decades under the pressure of finding better measures to contain the unwanted effects of immigration, i.e. again to answer to an external challenge.

At the turn of the century, the challenge of the *globalization economy* has been met with the single market and the monetary union, and the widening of the competences of the Union to almost all the areas of the public domain at the exception of some sensible sectors like social, fiscal and education policies. This solution has been reached under a further condition, i.e. on the belief that the most flexible interpretation of the public domain is convenient to all the member countries on condition that the open method of coordination is applied to the most sensible matters of national interest while less sensible matters are the subject of the somewhat democratic co-decision procedure, and matters with intermediate levels of sensibility to domestic interests are decided with other agreed procedures. Provided that fiscal policy and the most important parts of the welfare policies remain in the competence of the nation-state, this trade-off explains the rather viable and stable system of multi-state

democracy with which the European Union and member states have entered the coalition-building phase of world politics.

In addition, the European Union entered the new century coping with another challenge put on her by the change of the world politics, i.e. the challenge of extending membership to twelve new countries that were made “free” by the end of the bipolar competition. The effort to integrate the new comers is another factor of explanation of the “forced stability” of the current configuration of the EU political system.

## 5. Concluding remarks

According to the theory of the cycles of global politics, the incoming phase of *coalition-building* will experience further power de-concentration in the structure of government of the world political system, and the gradual re-alignment of the world political actors. At this time, it is hard to say what kind of strains this phase will put on the European integration process. In case a counter-coalition is formed to overcome the Western coalition dominance in the world government, the Europeans have to take into serious consideration the task of deciding on various trans-Atlantic issues of confrontation, like environment, human rights and democracy promotion, security and intervention, state-market relations. They have also to decide what is the *effective multilateralism* that they proclaim is the most important feature of the present world political system. On all these issues depend the agenda of the future structure of government of the world system. Will this situation causes another evolutionary change of the EU political system? This paper does not aim at answering to this question. It only aimed at signalling the importance of theorizing about the EU development by seriously taking into account the external environment. It is worth analysing European integration as an evolutionary process which is tied to the political, economic and cultural structures and processes that take place at the world level, and is based on the learning adaptive behaviour of the Europeans.

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