MAX-PLANCK-INSTITUT FÜR GESELLSCHAFTSFORSCHUNG
MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIETIES

Really Existing European Union: On Nationalist Disintegration, a Road not Taken, and Military Reintegration

Wolfgang Streeck

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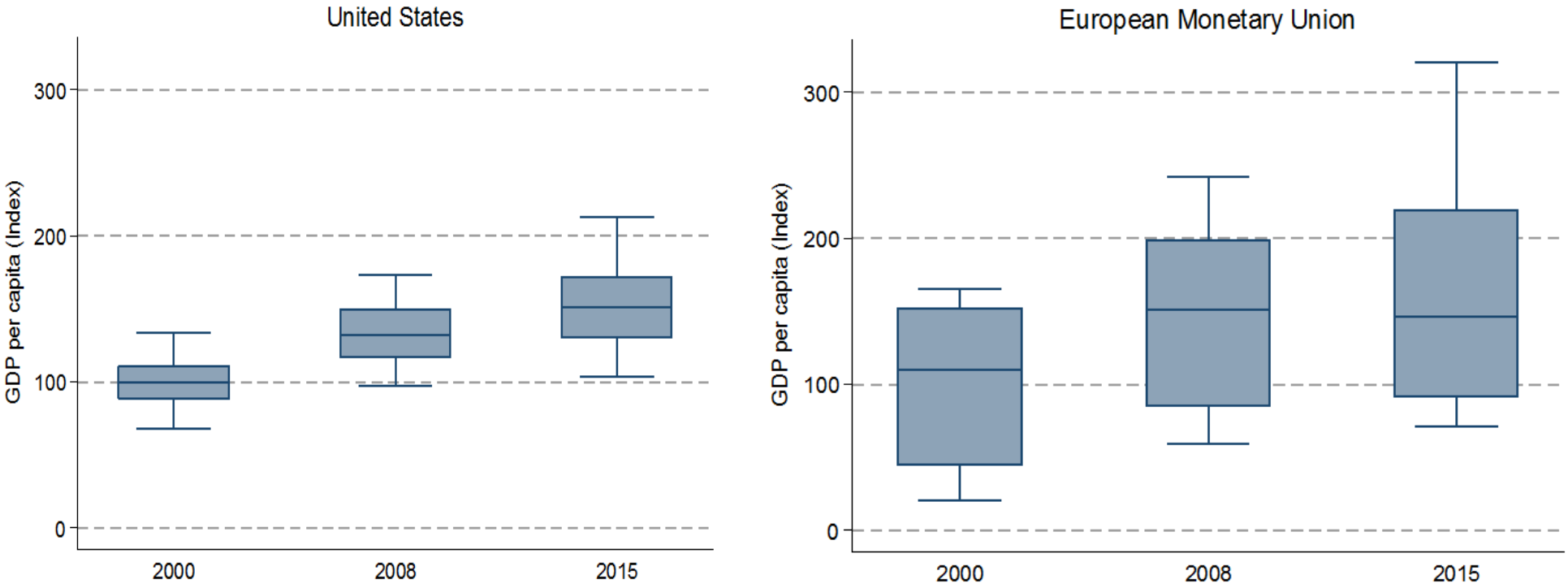
The EU today: Overextended I

Organization	Year	Members	Treaty
EEC	1958	6	Rome
EC	1967	9	
	1986	12	SEA
EU	1993	12	Maastricht
	1995	15	
	1999	15	Amsterdam
EMU	*1999(2024)*	*11 (20)*	
	2003 2004	15 25	Nice
	2007	27	
	2009 2013 2021 (Brexit)	27 28 27	Lisbon

The EU today: Overextended II



Average per capita income by (member) states. 2000=100. Excluding states with less than 1 million inhabitants.
Source: Eurostat; Bureau of Economic Analysis; United States Census Bureau, own calculations.

The EU in 2019: Stuck

- Overextended: Heterogeneity impairs governability
- Incomplete: Social Dimension; Internal Market; EMU (without fiscal, banking and political union); economic and cultural convergence
- Conflicts over: Cohesion funds, fiscal stability, state financing by central bank, "rule of law"…
- Superstate failure: Financial crisis, immigration crisis, COVID crisis…
- Used by member governments for national political purposes as scapegoat, land of hope & glory, executive conspiracies, executive photo ops, lock-in of neoliberal political economy, *vincolo esterno…*
- A frozen "constitution": Treaties unchangeable (except surreptitiously by ECJ); making neoliberal "integration" model irreversible, immunized against reform
- Sublegal, paralegal, illegal governance by improvisation and technocracy (ECB)

The EU under von der Leyen I: Falling apart or accommodating diversity?

- **Falling apart**: Gradual institutional decay
  - Growing „nationalist“, „populist“ opposition in more & more member states
  - Declining appeal of “ever closer union”
  - National improvisations replace “community method”
- **The road not taken**: Accommodating diversity
  - Constructive use of creeping decentralization: Taking subsidiarity seriously
  - Voluntary cooperation to replace bureaucratic, technocratic, juridic rule
  - National sovereignty to replace supranational hierarchy, imperial hegemony
  - Neither empire nor corporation: Cooperative association
  - More Europe through less Europe: “Europe of variable geometry”, “Europe *a la carte*”

The EU under von der Leyen II: Centralization via militarization?

- The Ukrainian war as an opportunity to return to the EU's failed supranational integration and centralization agenda, with the help and under the direction of the United States
- The Commission used the war as an opportunity to revive, under American supremacy, the "ever closer union" agenda of supranational state-building ("integration")
- From the beginning of the war the von der Leyen Commission acted as European henchman of American strategy in relation not just to Russia but also to potentially reluctant EU member states
- In this it changed from the passive role the EU had played during the prehistory of the war, into an extended arm of the United States, turning the EU into an economic and political auxiliary of NATO, the transatlantic base of American global influence

Prehistory: The EU in the run-up to the war

- 2001 ff. (Bush II, War on Terror) EU membership of Ukraine envisaged as part (or intermediate stage) of Ukraine's accession to NATO and the American sphere of interest
- Association Agreement EU-Ukraine negotiated 2007-12; not signed 2013; 2014 Maidan, Poroshenko elected in special election, agreement signed
- Russian occupation of Crimea, East Ukraine; local fighting in Donbas; United States start upgrading Ukrainian military
- 2014-15: Minsk I and II – Normandy Format without both the United States and the European Union (still including UK)
- 2019 Zelensky elected; 2020 NATO declares interoperability; 2021 Biden exits Afghanistan; February 2022 Russian assault; Istanbul peace talks failed, upon UK intervention
- **No active role for the European Union during this entire period**

The EU at War I: NATO auxiliary

- This changed under der Leyen I (2019-2014)
  - In relation to **Russia**, the Commission as an economic policy arm of NATO devised a broad range of sanctions on Russia, complementary to American sanctions. (Sanctions backfired early on, especially on Germany, while the Russian economy remained strong)
  - In relation to **Ukraine**, the Commission promised accelerated EU accession and EU-funded rebuilding of Ukraine after and during the war ("comprehensive Marshall Plan"). Discussion of structural implications for EU governance and finance are avoided
  - In relation to **EU member states**, the Commission mobilized public pressure to keep them in line with US, in particular on Germany which was soon designated by the United States to lead the European war effort under American supervision after American withdrawal, relying on the EU where useful

The EU at War II: “Europeanization”

- Europeanization means a long-drawn war of position, and attrition, along “frozen” front lines, with European countries responsible for keeping Ukrainian politics and society able and willing to fight a military superpower over an indefinite period of time, without a prospect of a final decisive victory
- A Europeanized Ukrainian war would be fought without agreement among its European participants on its aims and without a European capacity to negotiate with the enemy
- The United States could live with a frozen war as it is as a country no affected by it. A Europeanized Ukrainian war would also stand in the way of a rapprochement between Russia and Germany. The problem will be Ukraine’s continued readiness to “die for our values” (von der Leyen)
- The EU as a supranational state-in-waiting can hope to continue to serve as an American agent in relation to its member states, earning it a centralization premium
- The critical case is Germany which would militarily and economically have to carry the largest burden, also with respect to financing the war, directly or through the EU

The EU at War III: A journey into disaster (2014 ff.)

- **As the war continues:**
  - EU regular budget overwhelmed with arming and rebuilding Ukraine. *Kriegskredite*?
  - A European army as alternative to national ground troops? Who calls the shots?
- **Beyond the war:**
  - “Strategic autonomy”: France with Germany? Germany with the United States?
  - Relationship to NATO: Out-of-area missions? China?
  - Another Eastern enlargement (9 new members): Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine (!)
  - With 36 members: Decision-making, governance, military command structure?
  - Finance: One percent GDP and prohibition on debt won’t do; fundamental redistribution of cohesion funds inevitable; deep distributional conflicts ahead
  - For example: Common agricultural policy with Ukraine as member?

Europe and the EU in the New World Order Mark II

- **Scenario I** (most likely): A new bipolarism between the United States and, taking the place of the Soviet Union, China, with a prospect of a return to the unipolarism of the post-1990 New World Order Mark I after the defeat of China by the United States – A centralized EU under and within NATO
- **Scenario II** (least likely): A tripolar world with a centralized EU under French-German leadership in equidistance from the United States and China
- **Scenario III** : A multipolar world, with multiple power centers and a "variable geometry" of international relations among non-aligned states, with the European Union neither as superstate nor as empire, but as a cooperative of independent nation-states, a Continental Switzerland embedded in a global alignment of non-aligned countries of equal sovereignty

Decisive: The future path of the United States, between imperialism and "isolationism"

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