

**Jan Zielonka, 'Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union',** Oxford: Oxford University Press, first published 2006, print ISBN-13: 978-0-19-929221-9; 304 pages, 14 tables, 2 figures, 234x156 mm, £45.00 (Hardback).

## **BOOK REVIEW by Sorin Denca\***

During the last decade, the likelihood and consequences of the enlargement process of the European Union have been a fruitful avenue for scholars of European integration rising debates and stimulating contending approaches and explanations. In *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union*, Jan Zielonka, professor at St. Anthony College, University of Oxford, advances a metaphor and a line of reasoning in favour of enlargement. As metaphor, Zielonka's book proposes a new angle to understand what at first sight seems difficult to comprehend, namely the complexity and diversity of the European Union project. As an argument for enlargement, the book is an attempt to contrast the positive and negative aspects of this process and using the imperial metaphor to normatively justify it as beneficial for both old and new member states.

The book is polemical with the mainstream literature on European integration. Zielonka considers that two erroneous ideas dominate this literature. The statist approach to the integration process is the first one. It assumes that the European integration resembles a state-building process in which the European Union is incrementally acquiring state-like features. In this sense, the EU is going to

become a variety of Westphalian federation with a central government in charge of a given territory. The second idea refers to the impact of enlargement on the integration process. The enlargement is nothing more than a purely routine institutional operation, which is less probable to change the nature and direction of European integration.

Jan Zielonka argues that both ideas are misleading. The European Union is emerging as anything but a Westphalian super state, and the enlargement, referring as the fifth wave plus Bulgaria and Romania, is going to have substantial impact on the integration process and nature of the EU.

The counterarguments revolve around the neo-medieval paradigm as an analytical construct to figure out the nature of the integration process. This paradigm opposes what Zielonka coins as 'the neo-Westphalian superstate' model of explaining and understanding the European Union. The distinction between the two is inspired by the difference between the medieval European system and the nation-state based system emerging after the Peace of Westphalia, in 1648. Still, the author himself is aware of the risk of using ideal type models, especially when the concepts behind them are controversial.

The two models advance utterly different explanatory views. While the

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Westphalian superstate is characterised, among others features, by hard and fixed external border lines, high socio-economic homogeneity, a pan-European cultural identity, diverse overlapping regimes, a centralised hierarchical structure, absolute sovereignty, one single citizenship and one European army and police force, the Neo-medieval empire model advances the opposite features. The post-modern empire has soft and fluctuant borders, lasting socio-economic discrepancies, coexistence of multiple collective identities, disassociation between authoritative allocations, functional competencies, and territorial constituencies, interpenetration of various types of political units and loyalties. The distinction between centre and periphery is most crucial, but blurred, redistribution is based on different types of solidarity between transnational networks, there are diverse types of citizenship with different sets of rights and duties, multiple various overlapping military and police structures, and divided sovereignty along different functional and territorial lines. In short, the term emphasizes the ways in which the EU organises governance and projects power as opposing the Westphalian state-centric model.

The book is organised along six chapters, the first three dealing with the consequences of enlargement over the government and politics of the EU, and the latter three addressing the issue of functionality of the enlarged EU in critical realms of economy, democracy and foreign affairs. All chapters provide evidence for the existence of a neo-medieval imperial structure of governance rather than a Westphalian one. The enlargement process, it is argued, reinforces the neo-medieval scenario.

*The first chapter, 'Return to Europe'*

addresses the specific character of the fifth enlargement, including Bulgaria and Romania, as being completely different from the previous four waves. Zielonka argues that the nature of post-communist states made the difference. The communism annulled what historically was common between Eastern and Western Europe and created the East-West antithesis. The communist Eastern Europe was 'the other' for Europe and not part of it. However, in the late '90s, the Eastern Europe turned to be perceived by Europe not as the 'other' but part of Europe. Still, the effect of enlargement has deepened what it is already a highly eclectic entity.

At the same time, far from looking as a state building process, the enlargement stands for a process of empire building. This argument, proposed in *the second chapter, 'European power politics'*, explains the enlargement as an assertion of EU political and economic power over the unstable and poor Eastern Europe. The peculiarity of this wave of enlargement has been unprecedented. The conditionality package for the East European candidates has been far more extensive and intrusive than ever before. Still, the process of negotiation has not been a straightforward one. Zielonka maintains that because its neo-medieval internal nature, the European Union has been acting on an ambiguous and weak manner. The institutional and procedural logic prevailed over the strategic thinking and this is just because the EU is not a sovereign state with clear defined national interests. At the same time, the EU expressed its imperial vocation not through military, but civilian power, and by means of export of norms, institutions, and practices, which makes the EU a 'benign empire'.

*The third chapter, 'Diversity and Adaptation'*, is an argument against

demonisation of diversity as harmful in itself. Diversity has both positive and negative aspects and depends very much on the context and the objectives of the integration process. If the European Union will develop further as a neo-medieval empire, the diversity would have no impact on the integration process. The criticism of diversity is misguided by the perception that the ultimate aim of integration is unity, or by the fear that the enlargement is going to lead to a split between a core and a periphery and it will paralyse the decision-making process. Zielonka points out that 'unity as such was never the ultimate aim of integration'. The history of integration process illustrates also that the danger of a core has always been present, but never realised, leaving room for other weak forms of diversification, such as opt-outs, subsidiarity and flexibility. As regards the decision-making process, European actors are resourceful in finding ways out of institutional traps.

While the first three chapters focus on the impact of enlargement on the integration process, *the last three* discuss how an enlarged EU will function in some critical fields such as economy, democracy and foreign policy.

The three major challenges that face the EU in terms of *economic governance* are internal coherence and adjustment, competition with the United States and Asia, and instability caused by poverty in the EU's neighbourhood. In a neo-medieval scenario, the best way for the new member states to close the economic gap is through devolution, deregulation, and competition. The enlargement reinforces the variable geometry as 'a natural response to differences of situation or preference', better suited to address the competitive pressures of a globalised world. The policies employed by the Union attempt to change

the neighbours to be as similar with the EU itself as possible. Consequently, the distinction between members and non-members is more and more vague, and the interpenetration of different sorts of economic and political units strengthens the neo-medieval scenario.

The second field in which the impact of enlargement on the functioning of the EU is critical is that of *democratic governance*. The fifth chapter attempts to demonstrate that an enlarged EU is far more likely to be a multilayered and multicentred political unit in contrast with the statist Westphalian model. The lasting debate about the EU democratic deficit misses the point that the EU is not a state. What Zielonka calls a 'post-national democracy' refers to a Europe encapsulating actually many Europes, such as a Europe of trade, another one of energy or environment, a sort of 'multiple regional institutions acting autonomously to solve common problems'. However, such a Europe could not be but weak in term of democratic character. Therefore, the solution is to assume that the mechanism of 'public contestation', conceived as the capacity of citizens to contest European decisions, instead of representation serves better the democratic idea in a neo-medieval Europe.

In the third critical field of *external policy*, the EU has Westphalian rhetoric, but not a similar corresponding international behaviour. As a Westphalian type of international unit, the EU should be a sovereign actor, having a central government responsible primarily of the military and police forces. Zielonka contends that the EU is anything *but* this type of actor. Instead, the EU might be better described as having soft borders, various overlapping military and police institutions, aiming at diffusion of internal conflicts and

pacification of the external environment, using civilian-military policy means and norms to legitimise its external actions.

The *concluding chapter* represents a synthesis of the previous arguments. It looks at the geostrategic position, governance capacity, and political legitimacy of the EU and at the implications of the neo-medieval scenario. The main argument is that a neo-medieval imperial type of governance is better placed to have a beneficial effect on the external milieu, to cope with overlapping structures of power and to ease the function of the internal market.

Throughout previous chapters, the arguments for enlargement have been accompanied by those in favour of a new interpretation of the evolution of Europe based on the neo-medieval metaphor. In fact, the latter were supposed to provide support for the idea that enlargement is not going to negatively affect the future of European integration.

The metaphorical approaches to the European Union integration process are not something new. Neither the neo-medieval metaphor itself is new. Ole Waever (1995: 193-5) briefly touched upon the idea of similarities between Medieval and contemporary Europe. In fact, this book is not the first attempt of Zielonka to work out the neo-medieval scenario (see for instance his chapter in 'The future shape of Europe', published in 2000) and not the last one too (see his chapter in 'European Politics', published in 2007).

As mentioned earlier, one of the aims of the book is to challenge the statist argument that, according to Zielonka, characterises the mainstream literature on European integration. One might argue against this claim that the literature on European integration is not limited to statist approaches. The neo-medieval model can

be easily seen as an application of multi-level governance or networks policy approaches to the European integration (for a synthetic presentation of these two theoretical standpoints see, for instance, the relevant chapters in Wiener & Diez, 2004). At the same time, multi-level governance and network perspectives depart and even downplay the statist argument.

The seductive appeal of the neo-medieval metaphor is not enough to veil the analytical weakness of the model (Nugent & Paterson, 2004: 106). Some critics target the inconsistency of 'border in flux' argument as being at odd with what is really happening. Far from being fluid, the external borders of the EU are a matter of serious concern due to the fear of immigration and crime. However, at this point the author himself is cautious about the inherent weaknesses of ideal-type models and adds that it is not his intention to test theory, just to provide for a different view angle.

As structure, the book is balanced, neatly separating the discussion about the impact of enlargement on the nature of the EU from the functioning of an enlarged EU in the fields of economy, democracy and external policy. The option for these three spheres is justified in the book by the apparent contrast between what seems to be a progress of the Westphalian state and what the author himself interprets as an advanced of a neo-medieval order. In this way, the contradiction serves the author's purpose to provide evidence in favour of the neo-medieval scenario.

In sum, *the Europe as Empire* is a challenging reading, which both enriches and diversifies the literature on European integration, providing a new title that should not be ignored by those who are interested or involved in the debate about the future of an enlarged European Union.

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