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The history of Europe between EU-history and global history. New perspectives and insights. Vortrag auf der ClioH-World-Konferenz

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Dear colleagues,

in the next twenty minutes I shall try a - very preliminary - answer to the question how “History of Europe”, “EU-history” and “Global history” could be brought together in one single frame of reference. Let me begin with two remarks about central concepts:

“Europe”: Europe exists not just in the sense of a discourse or an intellectual construction, but as a socio-economic, political and cultural entity based on common characteristics which are empirical facts. In a comparative perspective, European societies are, as Hartmut Kaelble has argued very convincingly, “old” and rather well regulated societies. Social change is relatively slow, social cleavages between social classes, strata etc. - are rather clearly marked. The boundaries of Europe are in no way clear-cut; I’d prefer to talk about “different degrees and a gradation of ‘Europeanness’”, anyway. This approach - which is based on the relative socio-economic and cultural, but always empirical similarities of European societies - avoids essentialism on the one side as well as an understanding of Europe as a completely fluid and slippery thing on the other.

“History” is *res gestae* as well as research on *res gestae*: historiography. Research always has its “perspectivity”, of course, but this does not mean that all narratives are equal; above all, it does not mean that tales are equal to fairy tales. This is what I have to object against a fashionable social-constructivist post-modernism. Historical research should not produce a mere mangle-mangle of “narratives”, but coherent knowledge: We need systematic research programs setting out from well-defined leading questions and possibly resulting in “big theories”.

I cannot present such a big theory today, but I shall try to sketch one *in nuce* – a few lines which we may elaborate further today. I begin with a *tour d’horizon* through the three landscapes of “European history”, “EU-history and “global history”. And then the question will be how these approaches might be amalgamated. I talk about the long 20th century, i.e. the time span from the late nineteenth century till today. I am a contemporary historian with a certain bias towards economic history, and I do not want to transgress the limits of my competence. But, as you will see, the epoch and the problem fit together very well.

I. EUROPEAN HISTORY, EU-HISTORY, GLOBAL HISTORY: STATE OF THE ART

1. The “first basket”: European historiography has, to a large extent, been a historiography of the nation state. Very often, this has been a rather narrow-minded and self-glorifying affair. But the national perspective is - at least partially - justified by the fact that the state was and is one of the principal *forces motrices* in 20th century Europe. National historiography may broaden its perspective by focusing on transfers and on comparisons: this is almost a conventional wisdom nowadays. It is impossible to establish an order of preference between these two; they are simply different in kind, and this is why they can coexist. We should also focus on the mutual interrelations between the state and the “kleine Räume”: the “micro-spaces” as Ewald Hiebl would say: the region, the communal level etc. We should not *exclude* old-fashioned power politics, but we should, of course, *include* economy, society and culture. All in all, this is a plea in favour of an “enlightened” historiography of the nation state which we shall urgently need for the construction of our research program.

2. The second approach refers to “everything around supranational integration”, from the European Economic Community to the European Union, not to forget EFTA etc. There is a rich historical literature on these topics. But post-war supranational integration seems to have been the claim of political and social scientists in the first place. The political science paradigm seemingly consists of four elements: Firstly: the main area of interest is the world of political and economic institutions - maybe with a recent shift towards “culture”. Secondly,

research focuses on the mutual interrelations of the supranational level and the levels below it. This *Mehrebenen*-system is - and this is almost a conventional wisdom - historically new. It is a phenomenon *sui generis*: maybe *monstro simile*, as Samuel Pufendorf put it with regard to the Holy Roman Empire. Sometimes a teleology of integration is insinuated, but this idea seems to be on the retreat vis-à-vis the present crisis and stalemate of the EU. Research focuses, thirdly, on the time-span between 1945 and today; sometimes the “ancient” - i.e. interwar - prehistory is included. In this perspective, post-war supranational integration is a result of learning from the pre-1945 catastrophes. The paradigm concentrates, fourthly, on the “Western part” of the story. There is, of course, ample research on the Eastern counterpart, the COMECON, but the comparative links between these two “building sites” are rather weak. This holds true *a fortiori* with respect to the regional integration systems outside Europe like Mercosur or NAFTA.

3. The third basket, or, if I may say so: the global history basket: It contains a multitude of approaches, from old *Universalgeschichte* and world-system theories à la Wallerstein to the swarm of recent globalization theories. If we define globalization as “growing quantity and density of global economic, political and cultural interrelations”, we can distinguish the “first globalization” of the late 19th century - which was broken off as a consequence of World War I and the world economic crisis of 1929 - from the “second globalization” which has started in the early seventies of the 20th century and has not come to an

end till today (of course, I leave out “1492 and all that” at this point). Second globalization has removed a huge amount of regulations *between* countries, enabling immense global flows of goods, capital and people. It has, at the same time, liberalized the *inner* world of the well ordered and rather highly regulated democratic-Keynesian-corporatist-welfare states: the macro-model which has dominated Northern, Western and Central Europe in the *trente glorieuses*, i.e. the booming earlier post-war years. After the structural *Bruch* of the seventies, there comes a protracted crisis, with a fat bundle of problems: globalization means “redistribution of production capacities in a global scale”, with the consequence of a mass emigration of jobs from the old industrial countries to low-wage areas, followed by a certain erosion of the social systems. National governments try to find answers to these challenges, but their regulatory competences are waning vis-à-vis the globalized financial markets and the mega-companies operating in a world-wide scale.

II. NEW PERSPECTIVES

1. This is the end of my *parcours*. How then might these very different approaches be fused? How could we bring together the political science paradigm of integration with its deeper historical backgrounds, with its broader historical contexts?

a) As a first step, let me say a few words about “backgrounds” and “long-term preconditions” of the integration process. I give a few examples, not a complete list: firstly, the return of the colonial powers to Europe, after the loss of their empires. Spain is rather early, Britain and France come after 1945, Portugal follows in the seventies. “Returning” is a political, military and economic process together with large-scale mental re-mapping. Secondly: the Hapsburg empire - a supranational and multicultural universe itself and far too big and bulky as a module of supranational integration - is broken up. Thirdly: the long cycle of *Gleichgewicht* and *Hegemonie* (to cite the famous Dehio formula) is brought to a halt, with the final point being marked by the *echec* of National Socialism, as the last mega-attempt at hegemony in Europe, including a perverse program of European unification under racial and imperialist auspices.

b) Let me now proceed to “broader historical contexts”: the “fundamentals of integration”, if I may say so: I begin with the socio-economic, political and cultural, institutional and mental similarities mentioned above; similarities which, taken together, “make” Europe. Having grown in a long historical process, they become the fundamentals and preconditions for the establishment and the proliferation of the democratic-Keynesian-corporatist-welfare states after 1945. And this macro-model is, in turn, the socio-political fundament of supranational integration. Secondly: In the long run, this democratic-Keynesian etc.-model proved to be superior to Southern European au-

thoritarianism as well as to State Socialism as a “problem-solver” in a very broad sense of the word. And this was the reason for the “Southern transformation” in the seventies as well as for the “Eastern transformation” after 1989: Transformation means that the South as well as the East give up their model and adopt the more efficient one. The transformations were, in turn, densely interwoven with the subsequent integration of the South and the East into Europe.

The way from transformation to integration was made possible by the fact that, despite all socio-economic and politico-institutional disparities between “Europe West”, “Europe South” and “Europe East”, these macro-regions had never been *that* fundamentally different: economically, socially, politically, culturally. Let me present some evidence to support this argument: State socialist systems before 1989, as alternative scenarios of industrial modernity, showed a basic affinity towards planning and regulation - rather similar to Keynesianism. Maybe these two models were even more similar to each other than each of them was to neo-liberalism (this is true only as long as we put aside the difference between dictatorship and democracy for argument’s sake). The socialist economies had, well before 1989, entered into a semi-secret and subcutaneous collusion with the European market. And post-1989 capitalist elites in the transformation countries did not grow on a *tabula rasa*; in many cases they came, on a long and winding road, from the socialist cadre *corps*. Let me sum up: All these examples stress similarities against differences, as the long-term pre-

condition of post-1945 European integration. It is the historian's task and business to import these long lines, broad contexts and deep roots into the "integration story", capitalizing on the rich materials to be found in basket one, at the same time carefully avoiding all arguments which might sound teleological.

2. And now: new perspectives, part II. How can we bring *global* history into the integration story?

a) My first hypothesis is that the nature of the European Community has changed in the long run, together with the position of Europe in global contexts. "Europe" started under the *signum* of pacifying and controlling Germany, of putting an end to the "*Erbfeindschaft*" between Germany and France as an element of permanent disturbance and destabilization. The issue of "taming Germany" becomes virulent once more, as a consequence of German reunification: giving up the *Deutschmark* for the Euro was meant as a signal that Germany was not on the way back to *Großdeutschland* but had taken leave from traditional power politics in favour of Europe.

Market integration based on the treaties of 1952 and 1957 fitted well into the pattern of national Keynesian regulation predominant from the late forties to the early seventies. But along with the transition to global capitalism, there was, from the beginning of the seventies onwards, a growing tendency towards a "neo-liberal deregulation" of the inner world of the European community, a growing tendency towards an erosion and a dismantling of the welfare state, if I may say so.

When the East set out for the almost proverbial “return to Europe” in 1989, it did not really *return* (to a Keynesian Europe), but it entered into a new, neo-liberalizing and globalizing Union which soon changed the East into a playground and a zone of cheap labour for big business.

Deregulation was, as I said, an *internal* tendency, but as such it was also an answer to the *external* challenge of globalization: The expansion of the European market made economies of scale possible which improved the standing of the European business *behemoths* in the global arena. Another part of this European answer to globalization was and is fostering science, technology and economic productivity in the interest of world-wide competitiveness. And at present, the currency union serves as a sort of firewall against the brunt of the global financial crisis. This long line began already in the seventies, when the Schmidt-Giscard-*entente cordiale* fought against the global currency turbulences after the liquidation of the Bretton Woods system. Last but not least: The Brussels agrarian policy also fits into this frame of interpretation: it is the result of a complex inner-European trade-off of interests, but it has its *global* aspects as well, insofar as it blocks agrarian imports on the one side and subsidises agrarian exports on the other side.

We should, of course, not overstrain this argument of the EU becoming a fortress in the storms of globalization: a fortress from which - if I may exploit the metaphor once more - sallies are made from time to

time. Of course, the nation state is, and it will stay an important actor of all industrial policy: just look how and by whom the actual crisis of the European car industries is tackled. Nevertheless: the long line seems to lead towards a new configuration of Europe the structure, functions and activities of which can only be understood in a global frame of reference and, maybe, in comparison with other regional integration systems like NAFTA and Mercosur. There is quite a big difference between the “big three”, but, of course, comparisons take commonalities as well as such marked differences into respect.

b) My second hypothesis is that, at the moment, the European Union is acquiring the quality of a new power block in new global contexts: This process is partially based on the “naked” power of economic and military resources, partially on the “soft power” which stems from the attractiveness of “European values” apt to be universalized. All this is a very recent development: a matter for today’s newspaper, as it were. But there are jobs for historians here, too, in more than one respect. Conceiving Europe as a new global empire means: being active in the field of historical empire research: a rather busy department at the moment. But I warn you: a lot of conceptual work has to be done yet as regards “Europe as an Empire”: as I have said above, the political structure of Europe does not easily fit into ready-made categories, let alone the categories of empire theory.

Be this as it may: Europe, in becoming a political entity of renewed global relevance, seems to continue or revitalize old relationships

stemming from the epoch of colonialism: for example, the special links between Spain and the world of *hispanidad*, or between France and the African *francophonie*. This sounds very much like an idyll, but there are persistent and tenacious structural economic and political dependencies between North and South under the surface which ought to be taken into account here. Apart from this “colonial connection”, the changing role of Europe should be interpreted in terms of the new global system: a system that comprises the “old superpower” USA on the one side and the BRIC-states - Brazil, Russia, India and China - on the other. There is a lively discussion going on, sometimes in Spenglerian or Toynbeeian terms, on the alleged or real long-term decline of Europe in this changing world. Some say that the demise of Europe is inevitable, others argue that the seeming vitality of the rising “young” powers is a hoax, only camouflaging grave structural weaknesses.

The position of Europe in this new global system of coordinates is controversial still in another respect: some see Europe as an integrating and peace-fostering political entity; others denounce it as an instrument of political suppression and economic exploitation. There is a “big Satan”-line of thought, e.g. in the Negri/Hardt- or the Elmar Altvater-school. All these positions are probably not wrong but one-sided and, taken together, they are highly controversial at the moment. But maybe I should stop now and invite you to take part in these and other controversial debates.