



CENTRO STUDI SUL FEDERALISMO

PERSPECTIVES ON FEDERALISM



ISSN: 2036-5438

European Republicanism and the Return of Geopolitics in European Integration Theory

by

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Perspectives on Federalism, Vol. 13, issue 2-3, 2021



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Abstract

The Russian assault on Ukraine has been described as a turning point for Europe, putting geopolitics back on the top agenda. The war coincidences with a new German government coming into power, which might, after 16 years of continuity with an economic focus, follow a more “value-driven” and “republican” foreign policy. Are we therefore witnessing a turning point in European integration, with a stronger shift from economic to geopolitical considerations? What does that mean for European integration theory? The article gives first an overview of the impact of the Russian war on European (economic) integration. It then analyses the agenda of the new German government, especially regarding the relations to authoritarian and populist regimes and the concept of a “European Federal Republic” as a future vision for Europe put forward by the German Green party. Afterwards, the historic evolution of the economic paradigm in European integration theories is analyzed. Finally, European republicanism is presented as an alternative theoretical approach to European integration, which allows to combine economic and geopolitical aspects in a sounder theoretical framework.

Key-words

European Republicanism, European Integration, Geopolitics, Germany, Ukraine, Liberal Intergovernmentalism, Neo-Functionalism



1. Introduction

Already in its earliest days, the Russian war against Ukraine has been described as a turning point regarding several aspects. The new German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, for example, called it a “Zeitenwende”, legitimizing fundamental shifts in German foreign and security policy. Indeed, the Russian aggression has put into question the European security architecture and caused immediately some fundamental changes, especially regarding role of NATO and the security strategy of EU.

What does this development mean for the theory of European integration? The article gives, first, an overview of the impact of the Russian attack on the debate about the European Union (EU). For the EU, which had been so far focusing to a large extent on economic integration, the turning point could mean a stronger emphasis of geopolitical perspectives. Will Europe have to give up its mainly economic view on integration? Will neo-realistic views on power systems and “spheres of influence” play a bigger role?

In Germany, this historic turning point coincided with a new government coming into power, which already sought to adjust the German security strategy and foreign policy after 16 years of continuity. The paper will, in a second step, analyze the election manifestos of all three government parties. The manifestos indicate that a more value driven foreign policy, building on republican principles, might play a bigger role than economic considerations for the new government.

Both developments might impact the theory of European integration. The article will, in a third step, present the two most dominant theories of European integration, neo-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism, both describing a path of a primarily *economic* integration. The origin of this economic paradigm in European integration theory is explained. Especially Moravcsik’s liberal intergovernmentalism proclaimed the primacy of economics over geopolitical considerations. However, are these theories and their assumption still valid or do we witness a shift from a mainly economic perspective to a more geopolitical one?

Finally, European republicanism is presented as an alternative approach which allows to link economic and geopolitical considerations in a more coherent way by building a bridge between



economics and political philosophy. However, more research is necessary to evolve the insights of European republicanism and its application in political party agendas.

2. The Russian War Against Ukraine as a Turning Point for European Integration?

The military assault launched by Russia against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 brought the debate about the primacy of geopolitics vs. economics back on the European agenda. Since the end of the cold war, Europe was mainly concerned with problems of *economic* integration. After the Maastricht treaty in 1992 and the introduction of the euro, the major concern of Europe had been to solve the problem of an advancing economic integration process without political integration keeping pace (see for example Padoa Schioppa Group 2012). Even the conflict on the Balkans, the major geopolitical challenge of the 1990s, seemed to be eased or even pacified by the perspective of becoming part of the wealth machinery of the Single European Market. This promise did already help to prepare Eastern European countries to join the European Union in 2004, 2007 and 2013 and transform themselves into free markets with a democratic governance (although backlashes in this process are well noticed).

Nevertheless, this economic narrative had not been strong enough for political unification: the attempt to create a European constitution had been rejected in national referenda in France and Netherlands in 2005. When the global financial crisis, breaking out in 2007, hit Europe two or three years later, the markets did increasingly distrust that European politics would be ready to “do whatever it takes” and give up more national sovereignty in order to create a European political governance that would be needed to cope with the economic consequences of a single European currency. Finally, it had been the European Central Bank’s president to give that promise in 2012, however, the conflict between the pace of economic and political integration in Europe has not been solved so far. Populist movements sought to “re-establish national sovereignty”. Within this debate, the expression of European integration being a “peace project” seemed to have been an empty phrase to argue for more political integration without much links to people’s reality.



Putin's assault on Ukraine brought the European "peace project" back on the agenda. The crusade for the re-establishment of a Great Russian Empire is a challenge for the European idea. The attack made it obvious for everyone that the European project is also important to protect its citizens from outside threats. However, the Russian aggression does also force Europeans to redefine their identity. Which price are Europeans willing to pay to defend their freedom? And which countries should be part of this European promise? The images of civilian casualties, the harm of Ukrainian refugees but also the decisive and valiant fight of the Ukrainian people against the aggressor, for freedom and European values did confront European politicians and the European public with a moral dilemma. Didn't Ukraine deserve the same support as a member of the EU or NATO would receive in such a situation? Can Europe and the US limit their role, e.g., by limiting their support mainly to the delivery of arms for defense? Or is there a moral need, based on its self-understanding, for a stronger involvement?

Economic theories cannot evaluate these moral dilemmas and challenges. In order to analyze how Europe reacts to this new development, it is necessary to consider, beyond the well-known economic arguments, also increasingly arguments of geopolitics and political philosophy.

Is the Russian aggression even part of a broader shift in international relations and European integration in particular? The dominance of liberal democracies after the end of the cold war allowed to analyze international relations of states rather from liberal, economic perspectives. However, with the challenge of rising populism and authoritarian powers around the globe, geopolitical and power political factors become more important to analyze behavioral patterns. Putin seemed to have ignored warnings of his economic advisors about the economic price of an assault against Ukraine, he evaluated geo- and power political considerations more and therefore imposed also on Europe and the West to think more in these categories and patterns. In his speech in Warsaw on 26 March 2022, US president characterized the Russian aggression and the reaction of the Western allies as a long-lasting struggle between freedom and autocracy (Biden 2022). The next months and years will still have to demonstrate which side will be stronger.

However, the Russian aspiration of a re-birth of a Great Russian Empire is by far the only challenge for the Western concept of a free world. China is increasingly trying to transform its



growing economic power into geopolitical strength and might seek to secure its “sphere of influence”, e.g., by overthrowing the government of Taiwan. The “silk road” is a global strategy to increase China’s economic role in the world and redesign the global architecture. The historic connotations of the silk road support a Chinese self-understanding of having been historically the leading power in the globe over more than 5000 years of existence. What can Europe and the West put against this narrative? Can the Western vision of universal human rights and rule-based multilateralism be imbedded in to a bigger narrative with a sound theoretical foundation? Or will Russia and/or China succeed, maybe in alliance with other (semi-) autocratic powers, to substantially change the international framework?

3. A New – value driven – German Foreign and European Policy?

The turning point caused by the Russian war coincided with a new political era in Germany. The new German “traffic light coalition” came into office on 7 December 2021. Two coalition partners, the liberal (yellow) FDP and the Green party, switched from opposition into power, the social democratic (red) SPD had already a place on the government bench in the last election period, this time it could even win the chancellery. The SPD had been in power 19 years between 1998-2021, including 3 Merkel governments, shaping the German foreign policy towards Russia.

The traffic light coalition had been a marriage of convenience, rather than of love or ambition. It had been especially not clear, how to bring the liberal FDP and the social-ecological Green party together. Both follow very different concepts of progressive change. Whereas the liberals believe in market forces to manage change and modernization, the Green party calls for a stronger role of the state in order to deal with the challenges of climate change. Nevertheless, both parties agreed that a fundamental modernization program is needed after 16 years of Merkel’s continuity. The title of the coalition treaty “Let’s dare more progress” (“Mehr Fortschritt wagen”) refers to Willy Brandt’s dictum to “dare more democracy”, an expression that he used in a government declaration in 1969, when a social-liberal coalition took over the government after 20 years of conservative chancellors in office (Angela Merkel, instead, wanted to “dare more freedom” in her first government declaration in 2005). Whereas both parties differ



very much on the field of economic policy, they agree, however, on many reforms regarding civil society, e.g., the role of the church, gay marriage, liberal drug policy – and a more self-confident value driven foreign policy.

The coalition treaty focuses therefore on reforms of civil society, economic policy aims remain much more blurred. Regarding foreign policy, the coalition treaty seeks to strengthen the role of multilateralism and to re-found a new foreign policy with a stronger emphasis on “freedom, values and human rights” (Coalition Treaty 2021: 104, own translation). Therefore, the coalition treaty announces that the new government will “present a comprehensive national security strategy” within the first year (Coalition Treaty 2021: 114). What had been a verbiage during the coalition negotiations in the end of 2021, became highly relevant after Russia attack on Ukraine. In March 2022, new foreign minister Annalena Baerbock launched a dialogue on the new national strategy, a first draft will be presented until summer 2022. In addition, NATO is working on a new strategy after ending the 20-year long mission in Afghanistan. In addition, the EU is working on a new “security compass”.

The election manifestos of all three coalition partners include a clear positioning regarding Russia (all written in 2021)ⁱ. The SPD’s election manifesto emphasizes the problems that exist in Russian-European relations, however, following the SPD agenda in foreign policy of the last 20 years, it proposes a strong cooperation on all levels with Russia as a solution. It had been especially FDP and the Green party, who emphasized a more value driven foreign policy during the election campaign 2021. The FDP manifesto mentions clear and focused demands regarding Russia, which indicate a value driven foreign policy without mentioning much about liberal philosophical foundations. The manifesto calls for the necessity of a European Foreign Energy Policy and to pause North Stream 2 until independent investigations of the poisoning of opposition leader Alexander Nawalny are launched (FDP 2021: 49). Furthermore, the FDP called for strong sanctions as long as the conflict in Ukraine goes on and Russia suppresses democratic movements in neighboring countries, such as Belarus (FDP 2021: 53).

The Green party has a similar position, however, it is trying to develop a more value driven line of arguments. The Green election manifesto seeks a stronger international role of Germany in the struggle between free democracies and authoritarian regimes. The program argues that



“[f]or years, however, in Europe and in the world, Germany has at best moderated, often hesitated and finally gone to ground” (Green Party 2021: 207). It would therefore be necessary “to forge ahead as a shaping force with a multilateral, proactive, coherent and values-led policy” (Green Party 2021: 207), therefore the Green election manifesto claims “[w]e want to defend the fundamental values of the EU within our borders and resolutely champion these values outside our borders: human rights, democracy, freedom and the rule of law” (Green Party 2021: 207). The election program of the Green party argues that “[w]ith their authoritarian hegemonic ambitions, not only do states such as China and Russia, which systematically nullify human and citizens’ rights, force other states into economic and political dependence; they also want to divide Europe” (Green Party 2021: 208). Nevertheless, the election program acknowledges that a global transformation is not possible without countries ruled by authoritarian regimes, which demonstrates that the “global systemic competition with authoritarian states and dictatorships is real” (Green Party 2021: 208). The proposed solution is a “democracy offensive”, involving “federal states, civil society groups and parliamentarians” (Green Party 2021: 208).

Already in November 2020 the general assembly of the party agreed on a new Manifesto of Principles, which is supposed to describe the political agenda and strategy of the party for the next 15-20 years. The program emphasizes a more value driven foreign policy and proposes to strengthen European institutions outside the EU, such as the Council of Europe and OSCE, in order to create “a truly effective and strong system of collective security across Europe” to become true for “all Europeans” (Green Party 2020: 98 [400]). The Green strategy paper sees the Russian challenge much more as a possible clash of ideas:

“[I]n the face of Russia’s nationalistic and backward-looking policies that undermine Europe’s security and the self-determination of Russia’s neighbors, the goal remains to win over this eastern neighbor of the European Union to such a perspective on the basis of shared values.” (Green Party 2020: 98 [400]).

In the Manifesto of Principles, the Green party is developing a broader approach as a counter strategy against populism and authoritarianism. The manifesto argues that “developing [Europe] further into a Federal Republic of Europe is prerequisite for being able to help shape global issues ecologically, socially and democratically” (Green Party 2020: 17) and therefore a necessity



to deal with the global challenges mentioned above. Only by transforming itself into a republic, so the Manifesto of Principles of the Green party, the EU can “strengthen its ability to act democratically in a globalized world” (Green Party 2020: 64). The program of the Green party argues therefore that Europe needs to proceed in political integration in order to persist in a global context with increasing authoritarian regimes. This is because:

“To deal with global challenges, the European Union needs to be a power for peace that is aware of its responsibility in the world, especially within the framework of the United Nations, and is committed to the principle of international cooperation. The EU can only live up to this responsibility if it overcomes national divisions and acts together. The answer to the current global challenges is a constant deepening and further development of the EU, with the perspective of a Federal Republic of Europe.” (Green Party 2020: 89–90).

The major argument for European integration is therefore not primarily an economic one anymore. Nor is the manifesto stating the narrative of Europe as a “peace project” as an empty word. It does rather present the idea of a Republic of Europe as an answer and an alternative to the authoritarian tendencies in global politics. Economics play only a secondary role. The economic system represents the Western way of life with its value of freedom and equality. However, what does the republican paradigm actually say about freedom? What are the theoretical foundations of a European republic? Could a republican paradigm help to understand and frame the shift from a more economic understanding of European integration towards a theory based on political philosophy, integrating economics aspects? In the second part of this article, I will give an overview about these questions.

4. The Origin of the Economic Paradigm in European Integration Theories

In the public discourse it is often claimed that European integration started after WWII as a process of economic integration that was supposed to lead step by step towards political integration. The European Union itself celebrates the launch of this process at 9 May, the day on which the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman proposed Germany to create a common market for coal and steel in order to “make war not only unthinkable but materially impossible” (Schuman 1950). The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was supposed to be a first



step towards European unity achieved through economic integration, a strategy of European integration that today is called “Monnet method”, referring to the first president of the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community.

However, two important factors tend to be overlooked in this this narrative of the founding myth of European integration. Both factors influenced the theoretical framework that had been developed during the next years and decades in order to explain European integration. First, already between 1944-1950 there had been established important institutions to create a peaceful post-WWII order. Under the leadership of the allies and especially the USA, a number of global and international institutions were established, the most prominent being the United Nations with the declaration human rights in 1945. Regarding the economic post-war architecture important institution were born out of the Bretton Woods Agreement (1944), such as the IMF (for monetary stability, 1944), the World Bank (for investments to rebuild the post-war economies, 1945) and GATT (to relaunch international trade to a level before the world wars, signed in 1947, however, the International Trade Organization ITO was never founded). In order re-establish peace and prosperity in (Western) Europe, NATO was founded in 1949 as a military alliance of collective security. Furthermore, the OEEC was founded in 1948 in order to help administer the fundings of the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe economically. The Council of Europe was founded in 1948 in order to uphold human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in Europe.

All these institutions did not follow, however, the aim to build up a strong European federation with an own European “statehood”. They did rather follow the functional approach of international relations, developed by David Mitrany since the 1930s as a flexible and problem focused way to design international organizations. This approach bypasses therefore also problems of sovereignty, as it argues that international organizations are created by sovereign nation states in order to solve clearly shaped international problems. The main concern of functionalism is to avoid the creation of “economic blocs”, as attamed by Japan and Nazi German (as “autarke Großraumwirtschaft”). Mitrany argued in his pamphlet “A working peace system” that “now that we have had some experience of what totalitarian dictators can do with public opinion [...], we must look for some foundation that is not so easily changed by



propaganda or shattered if abused by some particular group or unit” (Mitrany 1943: 11). This theoretical consideration did shape the functional institutional framework that had been build up between 1944-1950 (for a more detailed discussion, see Zimmermann 2019: 56–62). Jean Monnet himself argued that his strategy to achieve European unity had been to establish a path to a European federation within the already given functional global framework, provided by the allies and especially the US (Monnet 1976: 344–46).

The second factor neglected in this narrative is the fact that there had existed attempts to launch a European government by creating a European army first, before proceeding more in detail with economic integration. The communist revolution in China 1949 and the start of the Coreen War in 1950 had been a shock for the Western World. European leaders were afraid that the focus of the US could shift from Europe to Asia, leaving Europe alone with the Soviet thread. The communist thread created pressure on both sides of the Atlantic to rearm Germany only few years after the end of WWII. However, the new German army was supposed to be integrated not only into NATO but also into a European army, in order to embed Germany’s potential military power (Loth 1996: 91–94). As a consequence, the *Treaty establishing the European Defence Community* had been signed in Paris in 1952, with the aim to create a pan-European military with common budget, common arms, centralized military procurement, and institutions (following the so-called Pleven-Plan). A European Political Community (EPC) was supposed to combine the existing European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the proposed European Defence Community (EDC). In the early 1950s, geo-political integration had therefore been given priority to economic integration. However, in 1954 the French national assembly rejected the EDC treaty, as it feared the loss of national sovereignty. Only after this rejection did the European leaders focus on an economic step-by-step path in order to achieve a European federation in the future. The Messina Conference in 1955 paved the way for the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1958.

The development of the theoretical framework to describe this economic path of European integration followed in the upcoming years. In 1958 Ernst B. Haas published “The Uniting of Europe”, describing the process of step by step integration in which political community is created through “pressure groups” and “spill-over effects” caused by the integration of



economic sectors (Haas 1968). Haas' neo-functional approach described how to reach a European federation within a function global order. In 1961 the economist Béla Balassa provided the according economic framework with the publication of "The Theory of Economic Integration", describing spill-over effects through the economic channels (Balassa 2013).

The focus on economic aspects on European integration had also been possible, because security issues were addressed already by the functional transatlantic framework that was created earlier, especially by NATO. The original plan, to limit the existence of NATO to 20 years, in order to force Europeans to develop an own security architecture, had been giving up in the 1970s, when the according article was cancelled out of the NATO treaty. NATO provided Europe therefore with a "free lunch" regarding security ⁱⁱ.

Since the beginning of the 1970s, the global institutional framework in which the (economic) European integration process had been imbedded, came under pressure. In 1973 the Dollar based Bretton Woods System collapsed due to the extensive costs of the Vietnam war for the US. As a consequence, the fixed exchange rate system was substituted by a flexible exchange rate system, global capital movements were no longer suppressed. This new situation changed the way in which national states interacted globally. They became again rivals who had to attract international capital flows. Globalization, as we know it today, with global production chains emerged therefore since the 1970s, increasingly undermining national sovereignty (Zimmermann 2019: 80–93). During this era, markets became more important than politics. The liberal era did also put the Soviet system under pressure, until it collapsed in 1989.

This new global framework did also push European integration. The Single European Act in 1987 aimed to complete the European Single Market, in order to liberate the free flow of capital, goods and people, ultimately aiming at introducing a Single European currency. After the collapse of the Iron curtain, the Maastricht treaty in 1992 paved the way for the introduction of the euro until 1999.

This new era also called for a new theoretical framework to analyze international relations and the process of European integration. Already in the 1970s Keohane and Nye developed the concept of complex interdependency as an alternative to the realist view in international relations. They argued that multiple channels of influence exist on different levels between



societies in different fields and that issues are linked to each other. However, this concept of complex interdependence presupposes explicitly that geopolitical considerations are not dominant and that military force inside a region is not relevant (Keohane und Nye 2001: 20–24). Both assumptions have become obsolete for Eastern European integration with the Russian invasion in Ukraine in 2022.

Robert D. Putnam developed the concept of a “two-level game” in which national governments are playing simultaneously on a national and an international game (Putnam 1988). Building on this approach, Andrew Moravcsik built the theoretical framework of “liberal intergovernmentalism” and argued that European integration should not create its own theory but should be embedded into a “general theory of national policy responses to international interdependence” (Moravcsik 1993: 478). Moravcsik re-emphasized the state as a rational actor, which defines national preferences, and maximizes these preferences in intergovernmental negotiations. The process of European integration is analyzed as a “series of rational choices made by national leaders” (Moravcsik 2003: 18), the European Community is an “international regime designed to promote policy coordination” (Moravcsik 1993: 478) in the global economic word order. Moravcsik’s liberal intergovernmentalism sees therefore sovereign nation states as key players, however, European integration proceeds according to Moravcsik only there, where nation states have *economic* preferences to coordinate policies. Liberal intergovernmentalism denies that this process has to lead finally to a kind of European federation. Furthermore, Moravcsik argued that national states have only low preferences regarding integrational steps on security issues. He rejects the realist primacy of geopolitics and argues even that geopolitics is secondary to economic preferences in intergovernmental negotiations (Moravcsik 2003: 5–7).

During the 1990s, Moravcsik’s liberal intergovernmentalism became the “baseline theory against which new theoretical conjectures are tested” (Schimmelpfennig 2004: 75). Moravcsik’s approach would reflect the view that the European Union would be mainly an “economic club” which was designed according to the economic preferences of its member states. This economic understanding of European integration came under pressure when the euro crisis called for further political integration. Moravcsik himself already conceded that “naked economic preferences would probably have led to a highly institutionalized pan-European free trade area



with flanking policies of regulatory harmonization and monetary stabilization”, geopolitical consideration must therefore also play a role to understand the current stage of European Integration (Moravcsik 2003: 5–7).

The liberalization of global capital movements reached its peak until the outbreak of the global financial crisis in 2007, since then, (neo-) liberal arguments became increasingly under pressure, as well as in the public and the academic discourse (see for example Crouch 2011). A major problem of neo-liberal (economic) theories is, that they do not consider issues of sovereignty in their models. The increasing populist movements addressed the undermined sovereignty of national states.

The assumption of a primacy of economics over geopolitical considerations did finally collapse with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which could therefore also become a turning point regarding the assumptions of European integration theory. Putin seemed to have been deaf to his economic advisors, he probably ignored the potential economic consequences of this war of aggression. The economic price had only been secondary to the geopolitical aim of re-establishing the power of the Soviet Union in a new Russian Empire, destroying Ukraine sovereignty, and to lead an autocratic offensive to overthrow the existing international order. Russia does therefore not fit into the neo-functional assumptions of complex dynamic societies, in which pressure groups can influence decision makers. With the Russian crusade, Putin imposes his geopolitical approach to the European leaders, who have to re-emphasize geopolitical vs. economic factors. By imposing far reaching sanctions against Russia, also European leaders put geo-political over economic considerations.

Furthermore, the Russian invasion touched industry sectors which are highly linked to issues of sovereignty and security. The war in Ukraine influenced the production of wheat, a staple foods item. Nutrition security is one of the basic needs that a government has to provide, in order to be accepted as a sovereign. In addition, the war in Ukraine demonstrated to the European member states, and especially also to Germany, the degree of dependency to Russian energy supply. The (traditional) energy sector, a large-scale industry with a few important companies as major players on an international level, has been a sector between economics and geopolitics.



The consequence of these developments is an increased importance of geopolitical aspects in the course of European integration. As we have seen, the two major theories on European integration, neo-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism, put a stronger emphasis on economic aspects. In what way could European Republicanism be an alternative?

5. European Republicanism as an Alternative Theoretical Framework

European republicanism is a relatively new approach in the field of European integration. It is, however, better equipped to link economic and geopolitical aspects within a theoretical framework and delivers therefore a deeper tool kit to analyze the current developments in international relations and European integration in particular.

European republicanism has its root in the contributions of Phillip Pettit (Pettit 1997) and Quentin Skinner (Skinner 1998). With their neo-republican approach, both authors tried to develop a theoretical alternative to liberalism and communitarianism, which had dominated the academic discourse in the previous decades, especially during the cold war. Neo-Republicanism can therefore also be seen as a synthesis between the hypotheses of both schools of thought, which defines a new equilibrium between individualism and holism and offers therefore an important toolkit to develop a theoretical framework for a post-cold war order, which is not one-sided dominated by liberalism. It could therefore be an answer to both, an over-emphasis of liberalism that dominated until the financial and euro crisis, as well as the populist and authoritarian backlashes thereafter.

One of the most important theoretical contributions of neo-republicanism was the definition of “freedom as non-domination” instead of the liberal “freedom as non-interference” (Pettit 1997). The liberal definition regards the action itself and supports therefore the ideology of free markets and a reduced role of the state. Freedom as non-domination regards more the context or relation of an action. In this understanding a person is free as long as no “arbitrary or unchecked control over the choices of another” is exerted (Lovett 2009: 14). This definition of freedom allows therefore for a stronger role of the government, which can interfere with the actions of its citizens, as long as citizens have the possibility to control and influence the decisions of the government according to republican principles. It is this definition of freedom



as non-domination, the Ukrainian people are fighting for since the invasion of Russia. They don't want to give away the access to the institutions, which they started to proclaim since the demonstrations and revolutions of 2004 and 2014.

Republican theory has been used in the 1990s in order to analyze the so called “democratic deficit” of the European Union. The Maastricht treaty in 1992 aimed to complete the European Single Market with a European Single Currency till 1999, however, it failed to achieve an according agreement on political integration, the different pace between economic and political integration became more evident. In its rulings on the Maastricht treaty, the German constitutional court did build on republican theory and emphasized that the democratic development most proceed with the pace of economic integration (Zimmermann 2019: 127–33). The most prominent academic dispute on European republicanism had been the so-called Habermas-Grimm debate. Grimm, a former German constitutional court judge, argued that a European demos could not be established, especially because of the lack of a European language (Grimm 1995). Habermas, the most prominent German philosopher, argued that a European constitution would be the only way to create a European actor, based on democratic principles, that would be able to deal with the economic forces of globalization (Habermas 1996: 191).

A comprehensive design for a creation of a “European Republic” had been put forward by Collignon (Collignon 2003) in the course of the debate of a European constitution and the Convention on the Future of the European Union. With the “res publica of public goods” approach, Collignon argued that European economic integration created a number of European public goods, which need, according to the republican paradigm, a European governance. It is this “res publica of public goods” approach, which links economic theory to political philosophy. Collignon' starting point are epistemic constituencies, which “[agree] on a constitution for procedural policy-making rules” (Collignon 2003: 28). In such a polity, citizens own, according to the republican paradigm, public property in common and “the legal community of republican citizens emerges from their status as common property owners” (Collignon 2017: 53). Economic realities, the existence of externalities and public goods problems, e.g., caused by the dynamics of a globalized economy, create therefore the necessity of a shared governance in order to be “free” in the republican understanding of freedom as non-domination. In this understanding,



freedom, economic prosperity and sovereignty are linked together. This theoretical framework allows therefore to evaluate economic development (e.g., in the form of public goods problems) and issues of sovereignty.

This link between republican political philosophy and economic theory has been further developed with the concept of deriving sovereignty from a “hierarchy of social institutions and public goods” (Zimmermann 2019). This approach argues that the categories of public, private, common resource and club goods, on which economic theory is build, derives from the ontological differentiation of a mental and a material world and to build social realities, as John Searle described it (Searle 1996). Building complex social institutions, such as the European Union, is a process to overcome the “state of nature” of a material common resource world without social institutions. Security is the first public goods to create sovereignty and overcome the state of nature and create social institutions. Only then can the sovereign decide about an economic system (introduce private, common resource and club goods), coordinate external relations and realize justice. The approach puts issues of sovereignty and institution building before economic considerations.

Applied to European integration, European republicanism has therefore been used to describe the democratic deficit that derives from economic integration and to describe in what respect it would be possible to build democratic institutions which are appropriate for the degree of economic integration. These arguments have been further developed and pushed forward by Ulrike Guérot in order to put forward reforms after the euro crisis. Building on Bogdandy’s proposal that the concept of a European Republic could become a “Leitidee” for European integration (Bogdandy 2005), Guérot argued that the European Republic as an utopia can be used to break the gridlock of the European reform process and to finally answer the “finality” question of European integration. The utopia is based on the assumption that all individuals participating in the European common market have equal political rights. This assumption of the political equality of the individuals participating in the common market would help to overcome the concept of a European Union build on sovereign nation states (Guerot 2018). As a consequence, the political power of the European Council has to be limited, the European parliament, instead, should be strengthened in order to build a real European democracy (Guerot



2018: 160). Guérot argues that this approach would be able to overcome the problems of populism, which we witnessed the last decade, as a European government, built on the political will of politically equal market participants, would be able to address the social and distributional problems caused by a common market. The sovereignty of nation states would then be substituted by the sovereignty of the European citizens, the gap between the degree of economic vs. political integration, which increased significantly since the Maastricht treaty, could finally be closed since (Guerot, Ulrike 2018: 331–33). A European republic would therefore be able to overcome the logic of economic integration and to find way to define a European political will through democratic European decision-making processes, which could strengthen political considerations versus economic ones.

Indeed, the republican approach argues that the driving force for integration is not economic advantage, but rather the fear of domination. Basic security and political integration must therefore pre-empt economic integration (Zimmermann 2019: 269–89). Even economic flagship projects, like the introduction of the euro, follow mainly geopolitical aspects, as for example Martin Feldstein has argued (Feldstein 1997). The ultimate scope of the “res publica of public goods” is therefore not to maximize economic advantage, but to solve problems together in a public process according to the values of the citizens. This approach leaves also much more space to deal with the difficult questions of the Ukraine crisis. Neo-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism might be able to deliver explanations for Ukraine’s economic interest to join the EU. However, they are not able to analyses Russia’s geopolitical influence into this process. Republicanism leaves space for both, economic and geo-political considerations. Economically, the “res publica of public goods” would suggest a common economic governance between Ukraine and all the other EU member states, if economic integration has reached a degree in which considerable externalities emerge. However, politically republicanism also has severe problems with power systems and “spheres of influence” from outside forces and rejects them as form of domination. On a global perspective, republicanism assumes that peace and prosperity is only achievable by creating a federation of republics, as proposed in Immanuel Kant’s perpetual peace (Kant 2007). This would, however, presuppose, that all nations become republics and reject authoritarianism and domination.



One effect of the Russian war on Ukraine could therefore be that the importance of political integration within the EU is strengthened, as the need for a common security policy is acknowledged. Republican theories play an important role in this process of institution building, as seen above. However, European republicanism can also play an important role in defining Europe's role towards authoritarian and populist movements within and from outside of the EU. A republican approach would decline a one-sided economic view, e.g., it would reject that a gas pipeline with Russia can be seen as a purely economic project, as the previous German governments did. According to the res publica of public goods approach, all people who are affected by the project have to decide together on how to deal with these effects, if people cannot influence this decision-making process, forms of domination could emerge. Economic arguments are not neglected in this approach, however, they are surrounded by a republican framework.

6. Conclusion

With the Russian assault on Ukraine, the importance of the republican approach of European integration might further increase. The thread that the European idea is exposed to might become a promotor for a stronger European security and defense community. Such a community would be the missing complement to build a European political union that is at pace with the degree of economic integration and might therefore help to overcome the institutional flaws that the European Union is lacking from since the acceleration of economic integration in the 1990s. Republican theory is important to develop a democratic design of stronger European institutions, linking economics considerations to political philosophy and question of sovereignty.

However, it has to be emphasized that under such a framework, Europe will rather be built on a common threat than on a shared dream of prosperity. A militarily stronger and more united Europe might also be tempted to use its military power in international conflicts, for better or for worse. Europe would therefore need strong democratic institutions with a focused set of values to maintain such temptations. Republican theory can also play an important role here to define such institutions and values.



Finally, the idea of a European republic as part of the world community might, building on more than 2000 years of European history of thought, furthermore be a counter concept to the Great Russian Empire, as well as to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. European republicanism could therefore contribute to overcome populist tendencies by offering a counter-concepts, on the one side, but also by building, as proposed by Pettit and Skinner, a synthesis between liberalism and communitarianism.

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ⁱ The manifesto of the conservative CDU/CSU does address Russia only in general terms, the manifesto of the socialist LINKE demonstrates much understanding for Russia, the right wing AfD does not mention any problems with Russia.

ⁱⁱ Nevertheless, with the election of Charles de Gaulle as French president in 1958, the process of economic integration was paused, as de Gaulle emphasized the role of national sovereignty and geo-politics. Stanley Hoffmann concluded that European integration may proceed in fields of “low politics”, such as economics, but stops on the field of “high politics”, such as geopolitics.

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