

Chapter 3

The European Union as a Chaotic System

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ABSTRACT

From an analytical perspective, moreover, the study of the European Union, both as an actor and as an arena, has also precipitated many theoretical attempts to explain the genesis and the evolution of this object that has been even provocatively considered an Unidentified Political Object. This contribution will defend that Chaology's conceptual core may be of great help to overpass those quarrels, and that, surprisingly or not, these concepts do also fit in the theoretical assumptions driven by Historical Institutionalism, the analytical school that, since the 1990s has been proposing a suggestive approach to the European Integration process that to some extent challenge those that used to be the mainstream positions. All in all, this contribution has a two-folded objective. Firstly, it seeks to review the aforementioned debates through the lens of Chaos Theory to prove that in most cases, the reciprocal critics among the mainstream approaches to the European Union do actually lack of precise understanding of the basic features of any chaotic system. Secondly, it proposes few examples to illustrate this chaotic nature of the European integration process.

INTRODUCTION

For more than five decades now, the still on-going process of political (and economic) integration involving the majority of the Western and Central European Democracies has given rise to a radically new polity, the European Union. Beyond its symbolic nuances and historical background, there is no doubt that the importance of the European Union stems from the fact that throughout these years it has critically transformed the many levels of political decision-making it is involved in (from the local one to the international one), it has evolved so much that one could even consider that no-return points have been reached.

From an analytical perspective, moreover, the study of the European Union, both as an actor and as an arena, has also precipitated many theoretical attempts to explain the genesis and the evolution of this

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object that has been even provocatively considered an *Unidentified Political Object*. Yet no consensus exists on the very nature of the European Union, and the EU scholars have proposed very distinct interpretations of the meaning of the European Union and on the most appropriate basic unit of analysis, most times confronting each other.

This contribution will defend that Chaology's conceptual core may be of great help to overpass those quarrels, and that, surprisingly or not, these concepts do also fit in the theoretical assumptions driven by Historical Institutionalism, the analytical school that, since the 1990s has been proposing a suggestive approach to the European Integration process that to some extent challenge those that used to be the mainstream positions.

For the aim of this contribution, thus, it is extremely important to mention that Historical Institutionalism introduces two paramount assumptions. On the one hand it suggests that the European Union should be understood as the emerging product of a complex process guided by Member States but with the necessary participation of other (sometimes, unexpected) actors. On the other hand, it acknowledges the historical embeddedness of the process leading to the current EU, and in so doing, it permits to understand its evolutions through the lens of Chaos Theory.

All in all, this contribution has a two-folded objective. Firstly, it seeks to review the aforementioned debates through the lens of Chaos Theory to prove that in most cases, the reciprocal critics among the mainstream approaches to the European Union do actually lack of precise understanding of the basic features of any chaotic system. Secondly, it proposes few examples to illustrate this chaotic nature of the European integration process.

Irreconcilable Theoretical Assumptions: The European Union as a Stable Dynamical System or Rather as a Far-from-Equilibrium One?

At the time of writing this contribution, the EU flag just celebrated its 30th anniversary. Along these three decades, those twelve golden stars against a background of sky blue have represented the unity and the identity of the European integration project in a wide range of settings. But for the aim of this contribution, however, this flag also symbolizes the fact that middle-range theories dealing with the European integration process have failed to establish a basic unit of analysis to explain its constitution and its further institutional development, as well as its policy production.

In this vein, *international relations theory* (Pollack 2002) and, even most importantly, *liberal intergovernmentalism* (Moravcsik 1993, 1994) have traditionally claimed that the European regional integration process is simply to be understood as a rational political bargaining among independent and sovereign National States, understanding that the twelve golden stars may be interpreted as independent and only partially interrelated entities.

Contrarily to that, more comparativist-like schools, such as *supranationalism* (Weiler 1981) have tended to approach the European Unit holistically, and have emphasized the need to capture the European integration process by means of the same conceptual tools as any regular national political system, even though they have also often highlighted the appropriateness of creating new concepts to refer to its uniqueness. For them, the EU flag would be essentially composed of a circle; and little or none further attention would be paid to the shape or the specific disposition of the golden stars.

These theoretical quarrels, with the EU flag fluttering behind, bring up other paramount metatheoretical debates (Jupille 2006) that refer to the different ontological conceptions underlying those empirical theories on the European integration process. Taken to its ultimate consequences, the debate between

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