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European (Dis)Integration and Migration Policy

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ECON202G: The European Economy

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Integration within the European Union (EU) has been occurring since its inception. Integration is the foundation of the Union that was originally meant to deter war. Currently, the topic of integration and disintegration has reached its height after the many crisis that have occurred such as the Eurozone crisis, the migrant crisis, Brexit, and now with the coronavirus. Looking at these crisis, it is difficult to see whether they have caused further integration or sparked disintegration. In this paper, I examine EU migration policy in the light of the 2015 crisis to determine whether the issue of migration has aided or deterred integration within the EU project.

Migration policy is an extraordinarily complex topic that contains many subtopics and, as a result, many different policies. In the case of the European Union it is even more complex as migration is an external policy often connected to security, which is heavily debated within the EU as many member states do not like to give up competences regarding to their borders and security. It is difficult to find a policy that all member states will agree with; nevertheless, agreements were found through least common denominator agreements. I argue that the issue of migration does lead to further integration within the EU as it requires the member states to introduce and reform legislation, expanding competences and strengthening the institutions of the EU, to stabilize the border after the crisis.

Theories of (Dis)Integration

The process of European integration is fundamental the European project. The original members within the European Coal and Steel Community started this integration process after World War II to prevent further wars within Europe, as coal and steel were regarded as crucial elements of war capabilities. This sparked further integration as it drew other European nations towards it. In time, the newly found Community led to the creation of the European Economic Community, the European Atomic Energy Community, the

Eurozone, the Schengen Area, and has now become the European Union we know today. This integration has been difficult and has faced push back, as the integration has resulted in the member states needing to sacrifice their sovereignty and competences to the central institutions of the EU. This was even harder to do as enlargement led the EU from the original seven to the current twenty-seven members, making it harder to reach agreements as the many members have many different interests and goals. Nevertheless, the EU project has overcome the difficulties of enlargement as things such as qualified-majority voting have made the decision-making process fairer and easier. The process of deeper integration has inevitably slowed due to the increase of competing interests, but it has continued onwards.

Integration, and disintegration, have become a popular topic after the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU. The prominent theories of (dis)integration used to explain reasons for these processes are neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism (Hooghe & Marks, 2019). Neo-functionalists focus on societal actors' interests rather than the states interest. This means that if they find supranational institutions to be more promising than national institutions towards achieving their goals or interests, they will support said institutions. Neo-functionalists support increased governance at the regional level, hence the belief in regional integration. Nicoli (2019) explains that the neo-functionalist integration theory is rooted in long term process of integration rather than the short term, such as unintended consequences, path-dependency, and cycles of integration. Path-dependency means that future integration is based off past integration as it narrows options. Unforeseen consequences of prior integration such as crisis, can also lead to integration in the process of solving said crisis. Contrastingly, intergovernmentalism views integration as the result of cooperation between national governments rather than the outcomes of societal actors (Hooghe & Marks 2019). It largely focuses on the new institution created by the interdependence resulted from international cooperation (Nicoli 2019). These institutions

facilitate integration among the national governments participating in them as it enhances intergovernmental bargaining and aids further cooperation.

Both these theories are rooted in economics as well. International political economy and member state bargaining is very important in the formation of these theories. Intergovernmentalism focuses on the positive-sum game, in which any benefit is a win, rather than the zero-sum game, in which your benefit must be more than any others benefit, as the member states focus on the any possible gains from economic interdependence and integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2019). Therefore, to enhance the economic gains from cooperation, intergovernmental institutions are beneficial. Neofunctionalism also draws from economics as the societal actors (commercial as well) benefit from economic interdependence at the supranational level as it creates more efficiency in gains and the furthering of their own interests (Hooghe & Marks 2019, Nicoli 2019).

In addition to using these theories for explaining and simplifying the process of integration, we can use them to explain the process of its counterpart, disintegration. Through neofunctionalism one can attempt to explain the withdrawal from previous political commitments. If the societal actors find that national institutions are more promising, or if they disagree with supranational institutions movements, than they can push to disintegrate. Likewise, intergovernmentalism can consider national governments pushing back against supranational institutions. For example, attempting to opt-out of agreements or working to lessen the power of different institutions (Borzel 2018). If the national interests of the states change or differ from each other, then intergovernmental institutions can experience pushback due to national interests being in contrast with supranational interests.

A prominent study of integration using these theories is the failing forward approach. Jones et al. (2016) introduce the theory of failing forward, arguing that EU policy was

reached through least common denominator agreements. This means that member states and their politicians created agreements and policies within the EU by finding a policy they all agreed on. However, this resulted in incomplete, or inadequate, policies that were fated to fail. This failure creates a cyclical integration process (Jones et al. 2016). The failures of the incomplete policies result in the need for more policies to tackle the resulting crises and problems. These policies are further integration because it expands the competences of the Community and strengthens the institutions of the EU as they create new policies or agencies to fix the failures of the past ones. It is a sort of policy spill-over, an important part of the neofunctionalism integration theory (Nicoli 2019). However, these new policies implemented are still based off the least common denominator and the past repeats itself as the policies are still incomplete, resulting in necessary reformations and policies in the event of a new crisis or unforeseen circumstance. This study relies on neofunctionalism as the unintended consequences (crisis) of the inadequate policies spill over into an expansion of competences as the EU produces more policies. Furthermore, it relies on intergovernmentalism as the EU institutions are strengthened to combat the crisis effectively and efficiently.

However, it is not just the theories of neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism that can explain (dis)integration. Ruta (2005) explains that these processes can also be determined by elements rather than theories, two important elements being economic integration and international security. Depending on the economic integration of the world economy, it may be more beneficial for countries to either integrate or disintegrate. If there are trade restrictions (low levels of economic integration), countries can benefit economically from political integration as they can then remove said restrictions by growing their political boundaries. With free trade (high levels of economic integration), the cost of political disintegration is low and might result in either stagnant political integration or disintegration (Alesina et al. 2000). Regarding international security, Ruta (2005) explains that when there

is high economic integration, there will be low levels of conflict as the prospect of war could inhibit trade, resulting in an economic loss. Therefore, in this type of scenario high levels of political integration are not needed, as the fear of economic losses eases security concerns. This means that political disintegration is possible if there remains economic integration. Adversely, if there are high levels of conflict, there is an increased importance on the economics of defense and domestic markets. In this scenario political integration will be preferred as it can lead to less conflict and the growth of the economy through trade.

Migration and (Dis)Integration

How does migration policy within the EU affect the integration process? To create policies within the EU to regulate something like migration, that has an impact on border security, is difficult due to both member states and societal groups own interests. While member states do not want to lose their sovereignty over this realm to the EU, there is also the case of rising opposition among societal actors due to fears of migration. These fears have always been prevalent within states as the influx of migrant's scares workers into thinking they will have to compete with them for work and pay. Not only that, but it also threatens the social constructs that have been built over time by the people within these states. This case has only risen as Europe has seen a wave of populism in recent years. For the case of Brexit, migration was one of the policies at the forefront of the vote that led to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU (Outhwaite, 2019).

First, we must consider the theories of (dis)integration listed above with migration policy and patterns in the past. A case study of this can be the policies following the migration crisis of 2015. This crisis was caused by the Syrian war, as refugees and migrants fled Syria and the surrounding area to EU nations with an external border, especially the Mediterranean member states. The influx of migrants caused a crisis as the EU struggled to

handle them, adding significant stress upon the EU migration system and the affect member states. The policies of the EU regarding migration proved inadequate to handle the influx, heralding back to the proposed theory of failing forward (Jones et al. 2016).

Scipinoni (2017) finds that EU migration policy was lacking prior to the migrant crisis and that this was well known among the Community. The failure of the policies came from the lack of harmonization, solidarity, strong institutions, and monitoring within the Community. First, from the Maastricht Treaty in the ninety onwards, the Community did not have any real strength in any sort of capacity relating to migration. The laws regarding migration, Scipioni explains, were “soft”, they had no real legally binding effect. In addition, monitoring was extremely inadequate. The Commission attempted to address these issues, but there was no solidarity within the council resulting a failure to create real change.

Stronger states, such as France and Germany, already had their own policies regarding migration and were not seeking to change these due to new policies on the EU level. Contrastingly, weaker states, such as Greece and Italy, did not have their own sufficient policies and supported the creation and implementation of migration policy on an EU level (Scipioni 2017). This lack of solidarity among the member states led to a lowest common denominator agreement, one that lacked both monitoring and sanctioning capabilities. Not only was there a lack of solidarity on the issue of creating policies, but there was also a lack of solidarity in aiding each other in the event of a crisis, financially or otherwise. Even with different agreements and regulations passed by the EU in the hopes of aiding financially in the case of a crisis, such as the Temporary Protection Directive and European Refugee Fund, the member states did not care to participate. As Dickson (2019) and Scipioni (2017) state, the Commission had no real power to enforce the solidarity of the member states in the event of this occurring. The member states did not wish to give the EU institutions any more power

relating to this issue. This lack of enforcement power meant a lack of harmonization of policies within member states and an inadequate system in the event of a migrant crisis.

This short explanation lays out the failures of EU migration policy. The member states had a lack of solidarity with each other, they cared more for themselves and their own nation rather than their neighbors, and the harmonization of policies was lacking across the board, as the central institutions of the EU were weak and had no real power to enforce implementation. In addition, this lack of enforcement led to a lack of monitoring as the member states neglected sending data relating to their border situations to the institutions as they had nobody to make them do so. These inadequate and incomplete policies, a result from least common denominator policies in which members states only implemented policies on the lowest agreeable level, is what led to the situation of the 2015 migrant crisis.

The migrant crisis resulted in two things. First, the lack of solidarity among states meant a lack of aid to each other. Governments began instating border controls under the Schengen Area that had not been seen in some time, resulting in a momentary disintegration, or step back, from the border integration project. Not only this, but policies for migration and asylum that came from things like the Dublin Convention, which established procedures for dealing with asylum applications (both states responsibilities and the redistribution), failed due to an overall lack of implementation (Scipioni 2017). Dickson (2019) furthers the argument of a lack of solidarity within the EU as she argues that the resulting crisis led to the dehumanization of migrants. The member states failure to cooperate and failure to harmonize policy across the EU led to migrant rights and health being overlooked as national governments turned to screening and categorization of migrants instead.

Second, to ameliorate the situation caused by the failure of policy and solidarity, the EU implemented new policies in the following months after the migration crisis took place.

The EU border and Coast Guard, the EU Agency for Asylum, the relocation of migrants, and increase of funding to those nations affected most by the crisis were all pursued to fix the situation. These policies lessened the stress on most affected member states in several ways. First, these states were given more personnel and attention in dealing with the migrants from the EU agencies. Second, they received fortification of their borders through screening and monitoring processes of migrants and refugees. Third, the migrants were relocated to other member states that did not receive so many to lessen the stress on the most affected member states. Lastly, funding was increased to those member states most affected and in crisis.

While all these new policies worked towards creating a stable environment at the EU borders, they forgot the necessity of furthering migrants' rights (Dickson 2019). The EU migration policy resulting from the migrant crisis focused solely on the health of the EU, as it attempted to protect the EU project from failure and its citizens from harm.

These new agencies strengthened the monitoring of the implementation of EU policies regarding migration and aided to create stability along the borders while also strengthening the central institutions of the EU as they now had some power over the implementation of migration policies. In addition, competences were expanded as the EU took over the relocation of migrants, asylum and migrant applications, and border security. While migrant rights were forgotten in the height of the crisis, the failure of the EU project was avoided as the Community avoided a greater problem, disintegration. This lack of focusing on migrants' rights shows that the policies were incomplete, heralding back to Jones et al. (2016) theory of failing forward. If this theory is correct, we can expect in the future migrants' rights to come into play as migration policy continues to evolve with the next problem that arises. Instead of disintegration, integration was achieved because of the migrant crisis through these two ways: the expansion of competences and the strengthening of central institutions. While

integration was achieved, this does not mean that there was no disintegration, such as the case of the United Kingdoms.

Case Study of UK

The school of neofunctionalism argues that societal actors would support either the national or supranational institutions depending on their own interests. Whichever is more efficient in solving their interests would have their support. However, in the case of migration this is difficult to entertain. Different societal actors have different goals and interests. There are politicians and interests' groups who support migration policies and those who do not. Specifically, there are those who do not support the handling of the EU with migration policy, as seen with the Conservatives of Britain and the slogan of "taking back control" for the leave campaign (Outhwaite 2019). Those in favor of Brexit were in favor because they did not support free movement and the influx of migrants from the Middle East such as Afghanistan and Pakistan. These societal interest groups feared migrants who could potentially cause unemployment among natives and depressed wages. Of course, these fears have been around for ages and do not hold true in most cases. This rise in nationalist ideas and sentiments, Wellings (2020) states, was aided by European integration. The free movement of the EU itself gave rise to the heightened fears of societal actors and nationalistic policies that ultimately led to Brexit. While neofunctionalism can be used to explain the disintegration of Brexit regarding migration, it is lacking.

In the same way, intergovernmentalism cannot really be used to explain this disintegration. Intergovernmentalism states cooperation between nations leads to further integration. The UK and the fellow member states of the EU were economically integrated and relied on each other. Jones (2018) points towards the UK's feelings of self-isolation as a possible point of this disintegration, however even with these sentiments trade was still strong

between them and the rest of the EU. The economic cooperation did not lead to sustained integration. Accepting Wellings (2020) statement of integration leading to nationalism and disintegration is a better option than attempting to explain the disintegration through intergovernmentalism. The theory, as Jones (2018) states, is unfit to go in reverse.

While the case of the UK might not be able to be explained perfectly through the theories of (dis)integration, we can seek to explain it through economics or security. The EU itself saw increased integration through the migration crisis; however, The UK had the outside circumstance of nationalism and societal actors lobbying against the EU that led to its withdrawal (Wellings 2020). If using the other elements described by Ruta (2005), a possible explanation could be found. In terms of political economy, the high levels of economic integration that existed lowered cost of political disintegration (Alesina et al 2000). Additionally, there was no fear of real conflict or international security concerns as the high levels of trade protected them from it (Ruta 2005). These points of disintegration, along with the rise in nationalism, point to the conclusion that the UK felt that it could withdraw and that it should withdrawal. The UK was the exception of the EU as no one else disintegrated in the same way, even those who also experience rising nationalism.

Member states such as Poland and Hungary, who have gravitated towards nationalism and undemocratic governments, have not pursued disintegration in the same way as the UK. Reason for this could come from the economic importance for these countries to remain within the EU, as the EU gives millions to both nations out of its budget. In addition, the freedom of movement Polish and Hungarian citizens receive along with the free trade within the Community are important for these nations. Economically, it may not be feasible for them to leave. Another issue for these nations is international security. Both Hungary and Poland are situated close to Russia, which has proved to be a large security threat. Political disintegration could lead to consequences of international security that neither nation is

willing to face. Poland and Hungary do not meet the necessary conditions that Ruta (2005) lays out for possible disintegration, even with their tendencies of nationalism.

Case Study of Ireland

Ireland is an example of not only integration following the migrant crisis, but also showed increased solidarity for those countries struggling from an external border. As Ireland did not want to be isolated following the withdrawal of the UK from the EU and since they did not receive migration like the Mediterranean nations, Ireland was free and willing to show solidarity and integrate its migration policy with the EU (Elliot, 2019).

Ireland shares a relationship of both historical and locational significance with the UK. However, this does not mean that Ireland shared the same goal of withdrawal from the EU following the migration crisis. In fact, the effect was the opposite. Both the migration crisis and Brexit gave Ireland the chance to converge on EU norms and showcase its liberal and European identity. Ireland did this through whole-heartedly participating in the EU migration policies arising from the crisis. Ireland did this by participating in the policies of relocation and resettlement of migrants and refugees put forward by the Community to reduce stress on Mediterranean countries. In addition, they sent personnel to the newly founded European institutions and agencies (Elliot 2019). Ireland showcased their solidarity as they harmonized their migration policies with the EU and aided the countries hardest hit by the crisis.

This integration can be attributed to a few different things. As Elliot (2019) points out, Ireland wished to separate itself from the UK in the light of Brexit. They wanted to avoid being ostracized due to the now complex border situation after the UK withdrew. Economically, it made sense as taking a liberal stance meant to continue strong economic relations. This means that they could continue to enjoy economic efficiency for both the

national government interests (intergovernmentalism) and the societal interests (neofunctionalism). Both the theories of integration can be applied to explain the integration of Ireland.

Conclusion

The European project of integration has not failed. It is still ongoing despite the recent crisis regarding the Eurozone, Coronavirus, migration, and Brexit. In this paper, the response of the EU regarding the 2015 migration crisis shows the process of integration through both neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism. Before the crisis, the lack of a central institution that could enforce policy implementation resulted from incomplete policy due to member states being unwilling to offer up more of their competences and sovereignty to said institutions. In addition, the lack of solidarity among the member states led to an unwillingness to help each other in the result of an unforeseen crisis. Therefore, internal borders were reinstated, and the EU was forced to act to return stability to the EU external borders. These new policies brought forth increased integration across the board for all EU members. However, this increased integration led to an example disintegration as well with the withdrawal of the UK.

While the disintegration is difficult to explain using the theories of neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism, one can look towards economics and security. As there was no security or economic threat from political disintegration, there was nothing prohibiting them from not leaving. This and the rise of nationalism aided the disintegration efforts. The case of the UK has proved unique. Many years have past since the beginning of Brexit and other member states experiencing similar nationalism have not disintegrated. Therefore, for the EU integration project it is safe to say that migration has induced integration as it has led to new policies that helped to strengthen central institutions and competences.

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