

ARTÍCULO INVITADO

The Fragmentation of Political Science and “Methodological Pluralism”: Regionalism and Geopolitics

Pere VILANOVA
Facultad de Derecho
Universidad de Barcelona
vilanova@ub.edu

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between our academic tools (Political Science broadly speaking) and the object of our study and research (the world as a global political system) is totally dysfunctional. The world, as an empirical political object, has changed more in the past sixty years (with particular emphasis in the last twenty years) than our academic disciplines and structures. This malfunction is becoming critical and the prospects are quite dark, not only in terms of our prognosis or prospective capacity, but simply our capacity to describe—therefore to analyze— reality with a minimum of consistency. If you add this structural problem to the debate over the legitimacy of “methodological pluralism” and also the academic micro fragmentation of our programs (both nationally and at a transnational level), we are in trouble. We need to assess the situation and see if we can re-direct our tools. And in any case, we will continue to work on a trial-and-error basis. In order to proceed, this paper will trace the evidence of the importance of these issues over the main international academic activities of our communities (Political Science, Sociology, International Relations, etc.), as expressed in International Congresses or Sessions of institutions as IPSA (International Political Science Association), ISA (International Sociological Association), or ECPR (European Consortium for Political Research). This is the reason why this paper refers to what is generally identified as the “Main Theme” of a specific World Congress, within which we can trace the importance given to the topic by different Panels, Working Groups or Research Committees. Of course, another strategy which could be followed by others interested in the problem raised by this paper should be via an empirical analysis of academic publications, papers, readings and Academic Programs (but this second approach is far too ambitious to be handled in a single Paper like the current one).

Key words: Political Science; Regionalism; Geopolitics; methodological pluralism; academic congresses.

La fragmentación de la Ciencia Política y el “pluralismo metodológico”: Regionalismo y Geopolítica

RESUMEN

La relación entre nuestras herramientas académicas (Ciencia Política en términos generales) y el objeto de nuestro estudio e investigación (el mundo como un sistema político global) es totalmente disfuncional. El mundo, en tanto que objeto político empírico, ha cambiado más en los pasados sesenta años (y de forma particular en los últimos veinte años) que nuestra estructuras y disciplinas académicas. Esta disfunción está convirtiéndose en crítica y las perspectivas son bastante oscuras, no sólo en términos de nuestra prognosis o capacidad prospectiva, sino incluso simplemente en nuestra capacidad para describir —por tanto, para analizar— la realidad con un mínimo de consistencia. Si se añade este problema estructural al debate sobre la legitimidad del “pluralismo metodológico” y también la microfragmentación de nuestros programas (tanto a nivel nacional como transnacional) nos encontramos en dificultades. Necesitamos evaluar la situación y ver si podemos reorientar nuestras herramientas. Y, en cualquier caso, continuaremos trabajando sobre la base de ensayo y error. A continuación este artículo mostrará evidencias de la importancia de estas cuestiones a lo largo de las actividades académicas internacionales de nuestras comunidades (Ciencia Política, Sociología, Relaciones Internacionales, etc.), tal y como se expresaron en Congresos o Sesiones Internacionales de instituciones como la IPSA (*International Political Science Association*), la ISA (*International Sociological Association*), o el ECPR (*European Consortium for Political Research*). Ésta es la razón por la que este artículo se refiere a lo que generalmente se identifica como el “Tema Principal” de un Congreso Mundial, en el que podemos trazar la importancia dada a un tema por diferentes Paneles, Grupos de Trabajo o Comités de Investigación. Por supuesto, otra estrategia que podría seguirse por otros interesados en las cuestiones planteadas aquí podría haber sido la de un análisis empírico de las publicaciones académicas, ponencias, lecturas y Programas Académicos (pero este último enfoque es excesivamente ambicioso para tratarse en un solo artículo como éste).

Palabras clave: Ciencia Política; Regionalismo; Geopolítica; pluralismo metodológico; congresos académicos.

A fragmentação da Ciência Política e o “pluralismo metodológico”: Regionalismo e Geopolítica

RESUMO

A relação entre nossas ferramentas acadêmicas (da Ciência Política em termos gerais) e o nosso objeto de estudo e de pesquisa (o mundo como um sistema político global) é totalmente disfuncional. O mundo como objeto político empírico mudou muito mais nos últimos sessenta anos (e de maneira especial nos últimos vinte e cinco anos) que nossas estruturas e disciplinas acadêmicas. Esta disfunção é crítica e as perspectivas bastante obscuras, tanto em termos de nossa capacidade prospectiva, como também de nossa capacidade de descrever —e, por tanto, de analisar— a realidade com um mínimo de consistência. As dificuldades aumentam ainda mais se a este problema estrutural adicionamos o debate sobre a legitimidade do “pluralismo metodológico” e a fragmentação de nossos programas (tanto em termos nacionais como transnacionais). Precisamos avaliar a situação e ver se podemos reorientar nossas ferramentas. Este artigo mostrará evidências da importância destas questões no seio das atividades acadêmicas internacionais de nossas comunidades (Ciência Política, Sociologia, Relações Internacionais, etc.), usando como fonte os Congressos ou Sessões Internacionais de instituições como a IPSA (*International Political Science Association*), a ISA (*International Sociological Association*), ou o ECPR (*European Consortium for Political Research*). Esta é a razão pela qual este artigo refere-se ao que geralmente identifica-se como o “tema principal” de um Congresso Mundial, a partir do qual podemos traçar a relevância dada a um tema por diferentes painéis, grupos de trabalho ou comitês de pesquisa. Uma estratégia alternativa poderia ter sido a análise empírica das

publicações acadêmicas, conferencias, leituras e programas acadêmicos, embora este enfoque seria excessivamente ambicioso para um artigo como este.

Palavras chave: Ciência Política; Regionalismo; Geopolítica; pluralismo metodológico; congressos acadêmicos.

REFERENCIA NORMALIZADA

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SUMARIO: Introduction. 1. Geopolitics and Regionalism. 2. A Case Study of geopolitical approach of a regional process: "The EU process and its theory: the nature and reasons of a major theoretical challenge". 2.1. The relation between theory and practice in the EU process. 2.2. One misunderstanding: A European political culture? 2.3. Another misunderstanding: A common Foreign Policy agenda? 2.4. Trends (and Obstacles) to European Integration. A (preliminary and provisional) Conclusion. References.

Introduction

The intention of this paper is to explore some of the issues as described in the abstract above. In addition, it will present a "case study" to underline the problems and limits but also the possibilities of the current situation of Political Science. The paper also refers to the increasing interest this topic is showing in the most relevant international activities of our academic community, and this should be considered as a relevant evidence of the problem raised by this paper.

For instance, the statement of the XXII IPSA World Congress (Madrid, 2012) underlines several issues, among which the following ones:

- a) new players are emerging on the world stage;
- b) the financial crisis has altered global dynamics;
- c) transnational governance is taking on new forms, such as the reformed EU and Mercosur (and, should we say, many other relevant regional organizations and processes);
- d) state functions are increasingly being shared with non-state actors such as corporations and non-governmental organizations, and are affected by the dynamics of an international society;
- e) the Westphalian model of interstate relations is not sufficient to cope with the challenges of global governance;
- f) but (I think this is crucial), the nation-state remains the key crucible of power in terms of elections, public policy and international negotiations, however it faces new challenges. Territory and power no longer align.

I would like to start with five propositions, or “axioms”¹ in the form of the foundations upon which we can build the full argument.

Proposition 1: Taking for granted the validity of the General Statement or Theme (above quoted), when we are undertaking a specific research we should try to explore in a more systematic way *what is new, what is old, and what is under a transformation process in our instruments of analysis*: not only our methodological tools (comparative politics, political theory, systemic approach, public policy perspective, etc.), but also the empirical context in which we work (as the Case Study I develop ahead will try to prove).

We will see that in fact there is a lot of continuity in our environment and tradition.

Proposition 2: Pluralism or, should we say, the legitimacy of pluralism in the use of our methods is not any longer under discussion. In fact, we should perhaps admit that we have been investing a lot of time (since the mid 1980’s in my academic life) and energy discussing not only the diversity of issues concerning “methods and schools”, but also dealing with a sort of “undercover” guerrilla warfare on “legitimacy” or even “scientific efficiency” of one or another school or tradition. This continues to wander around, but I think that we have quite a bit of evidence now on “the State of the Art” of our discipline and we should move on with our particular works (Keating & Della Porta, 2010; Schmitter, 2001; Jerez, 2006).

To a more specific level, for instance the Theme of the Panel on the State of the Discipline, Research Committee 33 (at the above quoted IPSA Congress) underlines this particular perspective:

- “It is a common argument that today’s political science is a fragmented discipline. Especially International Relations and Public Administration in many countries become independent disciplines (or autonomous sub-disciplines of Political Science)...
- “... Mattei Dogan once wrote that ‘disciplines increasingly see their formal borders contested, because the old disciplines do not reflect anymore the complexity, the ramifications, the great diversity of the work achieved today by scientists’, and his conclusion was that the networks of cross disciplinary

¹ In the scientific sense, an “axiom” is a premise or starting point of reasoning in order to build up a theory or a theorem. As classically conceived, an *axiom* is a premise so evident as to be accepted as true without controversy. No need to be proved.

influences are such that they are obliterating the old classification of the social sciences...

- "...The trend that we perceive today is a shift from the old formal disciplines to new hybrid social sciences".
- "Has the fragmentation of the discipline improved or worsened our capacity to study and understand politics?".

To try to answer these questions (broadly speaking) we should go back to some basics. Max Weber² is quoted by having said this very simple truth:

In this moment [in 1913: *n. of PV*] prevails in our discipline something like a hideous methodologist deviation. It is almost impossible to find a simple empiric work in which the author —in the search of his own reputation— does not find essential to raise various "methodological questions". But to walk, you don't have to know the full anatomy of legs. You walk. And anatomy becomes really important only when something goes wrong (Weber, 1985).

In other words, the debate about overrating or not the (in any case important) methodological dimension of our work as social scientists is not new, and will never reach a closing conclusion nor the certitude of who is right and who is wrong. And the ultimate reason of this conclusion is quite simple, and has to do with the ultimate difference between "us" —Political Scientists— and "them" —this is, "hard scientists" in all its variations (from mathematics to natural sciences)— in terms of the object of our analysis. It is the object, not the methods to analyze it, which defines at the same time our fragility, our limitations, and the hard-to live-with difference with our colleagues who do research on atoms, molecules, the Big Bang Theory or the Prime Numbers or natural numbers theories.

Because at the end of the day we deal with people at a social level (big scale or small scale, or world wide scale is here a matter of "specialization"), their behavior, their visions of the world; we deal with power and competition for power under all its forms (from democratic elections, say, in Sweden, to big scale wars in Iraq or Afghanistan). And that of people in society is a difficult concept to understand, to "see through", not to mention "to make predictions about".

Proposition 3: The world has changed a lot in the last 22 years (1991/2012), perhaps more than in the 45 previous years (1945/1990), as Judt (2008; 2010) pointed out very well. But we are still exploring in which ways these obvious changes in

² Note that in the references I give the Spanish version of the publication (Weber, 1985), which explains that the paragraph I quote above is translated by me not from German but from this Spanish version to English.

our global context —the empirical world as an empirical WPS or World Political System— has really affected our traditional intellectual tools. Hence, the fragmentation of our academic disciplines and subdisciplines has to do, at least for a substantial part, with this transformation of our environment. But as I suggested long ago (Vilanova, 1994), already at the XV World Congress of IPSA in Buenos Aires (1991) the Main Theme was on: “Centers and Peripheries in contemporary politics: interdependence and power asymmetries”, and where Prof. Jean Leca (1990) at the Study Group 18 on Theories of the State, raised several questions surprisingly familiar to us nowadays:

- “The dominant paradox emerging over the last twenty years is the view of contemporary world politics as increasingly inter-dependent and inter-connected as increasingly fragmented...”
- “... It seems relevant to combine three... views, two of which are very familiar to political scientists: World politics as an encounter between sovereign political units, each of them endowed with more or less sophisticated central systems of international integration; World politics as the expression of common challenges facing a world society which emphasizes interdependence and the civil aspect of world politics; and the center periphery approach”.

One could trace other examples. In 1988 (a quarter of a Century ago!), the XIV World Congress of IPSA in Washington already called our attention to “The globalization of the social sciences disciplines; the pluralization of Political Science; A global Political Theory?”, and so on. Other sister organizations, like ISA (International Sociological Association), in New Delhi (1986) and Madrid (1990) world congresses, raised similar issues: “Universal discourse and diverse paradigms”; “Changing social structures and global interdependency”; “Global problems and social resources”. Even the ECPR (European Consortium for Political Research), as early as 1994 suggested topics like: “International crisis decision & management in a turbulent interdependent setting”.

By the way, this approach raises another issue: to what extent the World Political Context, when undergoing through global structural changes (e.g., the End of Cold War), puts pressure on our disciplines (we assume it does), and how does it work? And this second question is less clear.

This is therefore a long lasting concern, and by 2012 we should admit that Social Sciences have accepted a *de facto* pluralism in paradigms and methods as a value in itself, although a certain hidden competition continues here and there to prove who is “the real” scientist. But this has usually less to do with science (in itself) than with academic prestige, academic career, the debated publish-or perish thing, the

funding of our (depleted) academic institutions, as one recent debate shows it in a very provocative way³.

Proposition 4: In this context made of elements of continuity and actual change or transformation, we have the right (and the obligation) to go deeper for the understanding of our world. Since we cannot be specialists in everything, we certainly can try to do three things:

- a) to continue the debate about the “health” of our discipline as a whole, its methodological problems and limitations, its contradictions, etc.;
- b) to continue to be familiar with the global “basics” of our common knowledge (power, competition, values, actors, processes, etc.); and
- c) to try to advance on the basis of sectorial knowledge, specialized research on specific empirical cases, cooperating with other colleagues, schools, traditions, and to see how we make some progress in our fields.

Proposition 5: In the last 22 years (since the End of The Cold War or the Bipolar System) some transformations of the world as an empirical WPS (World Political System) have prompted some new academic trends and situations. Not exactly by bringing in brand new theories or evidence, but by reviving some concepts, theories, sub-disciplines or fields of specialization, that were already “there”, but have been reactivated by new scenarios. The national and international activities of our academic community, in particular with IPSA, ECPR and other high level meetings underline this trend and prove the opportunities and difficulties of the way ahead.

In order to conclude this introduction, one could say:

1. Political Science continues to have (as an element of continuity, not of innovation) a unity of object which turns around power, competition for power, social behavior of individual people, and ultimately, on actors, processes (on how actors relate among themselves), dynamics or outputs of these processes,

³ See the debate on Peer Reviewing and Research Evaluation, available at URL: <<http://www.peer-reviewing.org/pr12/>>, accessed on 12 March 2013. See also URL: <<http://www.iis2012.org/wmsci/website/default.asp?vc=27>>, accessed on 12 March 2013; and David Horrobin: “Something Rotten at the core of science?”, at URL: <http://www.introductiontorife.com/refandres/files/papers_articles/Something%20Rotten%20-%20Horrobin.pdf>, accessed on 25 August 2013.

- at different scales and levels (nation-state, supranational/regional, international, sub-state level, regional, municipal).
2. This unity of object is only the common assumption within which an inevitable and growing need for specialization is here to stay, to grow, to enlarge our capacity of the ultimate reason of our academic existence: how to understand the world in which we live in political terms?: Therefore, the unity of object goes hand in hand with specialization. Fragmentation and competition are concepts that go in the same direction. But we should not forget the difference between ends and means, in particular the fact that our instruments are only that: means to achieve something.
 3. And our disciplines must remain modest as for the aims or ends we look for.
 4. A well learned lesson of the last two decades is that once we assumed these features of our field of knowledge, we have made serious progress in a variety of subfields, in terms of improving our analytical capacity, our ability to analyze and describe phenomena; at the same time, we learned and eventually quite well accepted the limitations of our capacity to predict, to foresee the future out of wrong understanding of things like Games Theory, Rational Choice, or Prospective.
 5. Two examples of sub-disciplines that in my opinion have been reactivated in these last two decades are *Geopolitics and Regionalism* (or Regional Studies), which have a close relationship with each other but are not the same. My assumption is that this is a case of a reactivation as a tentative response to the structural pressure of Social Sciences in general and Political Science (as well as International Relations) in particular. The new importance of both Geopolitics and Regionalism is a consequence (not only an “academic” consequence) of the social global impact of this international changing structure. This Paper will analyze these two specific subfields as an example of the previous reasoning and will subsequently use as a specific Case Study (the European Union Process) to further prove the hypothesis. As we shall see, one of the reasons is that we perceive the empirical change in progress, but we have not adapted yet our theoretical instruments to catch up with it.

1. Geopolitics and Regionalism

Following the same pattern, we can take the current “mission statement” of RC41 of IPSA (on Geopolitics) states:

RC41 promotes the study of Geopolitics; a concept that today includes those variables important for a country’s foreign policy options, and which cannot be changed by governmental policy in a short period of time. These variables include, among others, a country’s positioning in the international and regional systems, its relation-

ship to the processes of globalization, and its relative power resources along different dimensions (economic, political, military, cultural etc.).

The research program includes case studies concerning the reciprocal relationship between geopolitical influences and foreign policy behavior, and contributions to theorizing on the broader relationship between geopolitics and political behavior.

Geopolitics is a discipline which can be characterized as:

- a) A part of Social Sciences in the broad sense.
- b) A specific and specialized discipline within Political Science and International Relations
- c) This implies certain conditions about the methodological possibilities and limitations of the discipline. It has to deal with other specialized sub-disciplines, like “political or human geography, History, International Public Law, Sociology, Anthropology. This should not be approached in terms of “hostile competition” or “incompatibility”, but rather as “constructive cooperation” on the grounds of “pluralist methodology”, which is indispensable in social sciences.
- d) It is taking a new vigorous impulse in recent years (Ó Thuathail and Dalby, 1998; 2006), probably due to the “fragmentation” of the world political system. It deals not only with conflicts, but also with cooperative processes (*i.e.* regionalism).

Therefore it has to do with politics, power and competition among actors (of different nature) over an open set of issues: territory, borders, resources, status, ideological control, trade, etc. (the list is open). It puts the accent on the following “triangle”: the relationship between territory, people/s, power (competition over it).

As for *Regionalism*, Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell (1995) stressed in their classic work on regionalism:

The past five [this is, since 1990: *n. of PV*] years have witnessed a resurgence of regionalism in world politics. Old regionalist organizations have been revived, new organizations formed, and regionalism and the call for strengthened regionalist arrangements have been central to many of the debates about the nature of the post-Cold War international order. (We must ask) whether there are common factors behind the revival of regionalism in so many different parts of the world; and it analyzes the cumulative impact of different brands of regionalism on international order. Leading specialists take a critical look at recent trends towards the new regionalism and regionalization, assessing their origins, their present and future prospects, and their place in the evolving international order. As well as concentrating on specific regions, (this work) looks at the theories of regionalism, the balance between regionalization and globalization in the world economy, the relationship between regional

organizations and the United Nations, and the relationship between the revival of regionalism and questions of identity and nationalism.

We must explore the importance of this “new regionalism” within the context of a WPS (World Political System) in full transformation. It is not exactly a new phenomenon, since the WPS was already familiar with “regional subsystems” under the logic of the bipolar world. But the fall of bipolarism has released the “autonomy” of such regional subsystems, which cover a wide range of cases. We should assume that this “new regionalism” can include cases in which the dominant parameter is “conflict” (Peter Wallensteen and Margareta Sollenberg, 1998), as well as cases in which the predominant paradigm is “stabilization” (as for the European Union, the Council of Europe, ASEAN, OSCE, etc.). Basically we have faced three kinds of situations since 1990:

- a) Regional subsystems already existing, with a long tradition, which were “dormant” or with a very low profile of activity in the second half of the Cold War, like ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations).⁴ Since the mid 1990’s, ASEAN has had a reactivated agenda, a growing regional influence in its area, and is attracting new states coming out of recent transitions, like Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia, etc.
- b) Regional subsystems which are radically new, emerging from new “regimes” or “regional processes”, and gaining a key role in the current WPS. The most obvious case (but not the only one) is the SCO (Shanghai Organization for Cooperation).⁵
- c) In some cases, regionalism is not adopting an institutional and legal structure, but as a process it is playing an unprecedented essential role. The two most visible cases are the Group of Six⁶ (as a “regional regime” and as a process by which six nations try to keep the Nuclear Weapons program of North Korea under control), or the Group 5+1 on Iran, for the same purpose.

In other words, Geopolitics + regionalism (or “new regionalism”) can be a good strategy to try to understand some of the transformations of the WPS, when it seems quite obvious that only a multidisciplinary approach can provide some results.

⁴ See URL: <www.aseansec.org>, accessed on 12 March 2012.

⁵ See URL: <<http://www.sectsc.org/EN/>>, accessed on 12 March 2012.

⁶ Also known as the “Six-Party Talks”. See URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six-party_talks>, accessed on 15 April 2012.

2. A Case Study of geopolitical approach of a regional process: “The EU process and its theory: the nature and reasons of a major theoretical challenge”⁷

Let us take a very well know Case Study to try to explore some of the issues mentioned above: the EU Process. It is worth exploring a case which has to do with theory (and theories) and methods, and this is the constant difficulty of analyzing the European Union and the wider “European process” in terms of a Political System, or a Political System of a new kind, as opposed to the “classic” State-type political system. In particular, it intends to explore the theoretical problems of building a theory while the European process is already in the making but in contradictory progress, taking for granted that to some extent it can be considered irreversible (within the current general parameters of reality). In other words, we can call for a general “pluridisciplinary approach” as a sort of “invocation”; but it does not mean that we have tested it and already confirmed the results. Which part of each discipline we take? How we calibrate the proportions of each one? Is there a paradigmatic hierarchy among them? Our theories and methods run backwards the reality.

The arguments presented here are linked to the current international crisis and its specific impact on the European Union (EU) and its institutions. It may be true that in the future we will be able to assess the dimensions of this impact, but my hypothesis is that —with the evidence we have as of May 2012— the EU can still be considered an irreversible process, although if the Euro zone and the New “Fiscal Treaty” of 2012 present some qualitative innovations at a regional and global level. Again, we can consider this new Treaty a strange case of a “Treaty within a Treaty”, that International Public Law (IPL) can partly explain in its formal dimension. But let us not forget that on the basis of IPL, the current Lisbon Treaty does not foresee an institutional mechanism by which a State member can be “expelled” from the Euro, given it does not do it on a voluntary basis. In other words, the new Treaty has to do with state members (who signed it) and a common “budgetary and fiscal discipline”. The current crisis has added another dynamic in the already extremely complex “European architecture” of the EU.

The traditional combination of disciplines of Political Science (in particular the systemic approach and comparative politics), Constitutional Law, International Public Law and International Relations are not entirely satisfactory in terms of an interdisciplinary approach, though they are indispensable. Part of the reason of this theoretical weakness can be found in the nature of this peculiar political process, as

⁷ An earlier and shorter version of this work was presented at the *EpsNet Plenary Conference* 2004, Prague, under the Main Theme: “Political Science after the EU enlargement: constructing, consolidating, constitutionalising the European Union in times of crisis”.

well as in the behavior of its political elites (and the subsequent societal perception). Two or three specific problems in the last twelve years deserve a close look: the reasons and the meaning of the debate about the ultimate nature of the so-called and failed Constitution (which in the end could have only been a reform of an International Treaty, not a Constitution pending of a constituent process and Constitutional Law as a rule); and the extremely disputable decision about the 2004 enlargement of the EU at an unprecedented scale; the European elections of June (2004) showed once more the declining concern of Europeans for this kind of elections, even at the gate of such important events.

Ultimately, it is necessary to consider the consequences of the situation in terms of innovating the teaching of any course or matter relating to the Europeanization Process as a whole, under a comprehensive perspective.

2.1. The relation between theory and practice in the EU process

The first problem is how to define the European Union, within the European process, in terms of the current available theories. As it is now, it can only be defined as an *UQCFO* (Unidentified Quasi-Constitutional Flying Object). We must look on the basis of which theoretical tools we approach the analysis. From the perspective of International Public Law, the EU process still has a strong legal dimension relating to this discipline. Its institutional framework is Inter-Governmental in the classic sense, as for instance the European Council or the Council of Ministers. But there are other institutions or elements which challenge this definition at least from a formal viewpoint: the Commission (which is a “quasi-executive” organ of an Assembly Political System, or an important European Institution less nationally chauvinistic than the Council), and to some extent, the European Parliament, which is a chamber of representation, but much less a Parliament in the sense provided by classic Constitutional Law.

In other words, following the classic International Public Law approach, we should then move towards the theory of Confederations, in order to find some “confederal” trends in the process, more obvious (or ambitious) after Maastricht; for instance, a common Foreign and Security Policy,⁸ as pointed out by Biscop and Coelmont (2010). The problem is to see if the general trends of the process pushed the EU towards a framework of interpretation more depending of Constitutional Law than International Public Law. The answer is no.

⁸ The formal changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty to the Common Foreign and Security policy, with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and its Foreign Service, have not reached the expectations created by those same European elites which prompted the reform of the Nice Treaty.

To analyze a political phenomenon, therefore, we seem to be limited by the currently available tools. In the case of the European Process, once verified that International Public Law is not sufficient, a traditional approach could suggest looking at Constitutional Law, Political Theory, Theories of the State, Comparative Politics, International Relations, etc. The fact is that the process seems to be complex enough to consider that there is a “theoretical weakness”. It is not the first time that a political process goes much ahead than the available theories to analyze it.

When the American Revolution took place, the process showed how the revolution started with a war of independence, ended up (in a first stage) with the Confederation of the Thirteen Colonies, and then shifted from the Confederation to a “more perfect Union”, the Federal State. The American process created (in terms of “inventing”) at the same time the Federal State as a new technique of government, and the Theory to describe it (through the debate at the Journal *The Federalist*). There was nothing such as a “handbook” on a “federalist theory” upon which to decide what form of Government should substitute the Confederation. The “founding fathers” had on hand some elements of “*la Philosophie des Lumières*”, a lot of Political Philosophy, a considerable analysis of Monarchy and Republic as “Forms of State”, but not the basics about de-centralization, or the meaning of Federalism as a form of Government.

What is suggested here is the following: at a certain time in the future, it will be possible to have a more elaborated Theory to describe processes like the European Union in the making, as well as complex phenomena like the “European architecture” (this is, the relation between several supranational European organizations with an unclear distribution of competences or a clear hierarchy).⁹ And it is the process in the making which will provide it.

In the meantime, we must use the categories we are familiar with. The EU, at the present stage, is more than a traditional Intergovernmental organization, but still less than a Federal or Quasi Federal Political System. But even if it leans more towards the former, it already has strong elements of the latter. Furthermore, the tendency seems consistent and irreversible in that direction. The current crisis, for instance, seems to reinforce the interdependence of the member states, and the competition over status or hierarchical power (Germany, France, etc.) among them, much more than a “federal logic”.

If the “superstructure” is still Intergovernmental (European Council, Council of Ministers), and if there are some new Qualitative institutions, such as the Commission and partly the European Parliament and the EU Court of Justice, the structure

⁹ The “European architecture” cannot be reduced to Europe = EU, since other important regional European organizations have their own logic. To quote only three, NATO, OSCE, Council of Europe, all of them have different roles, and the overlapping membership of so many European states in all of them contributes to all but a common “European logic”.

(basically, in its economic dimension) is heavily integrated. In other words, the architecture of the building suggests a vertical combination of integration (structure) and intergovernmental cooperation (supra structure), as is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Levels and objects of analysis and analytical tools

Inter-Governmental level	European Council, Council of Ministers	International Public Law + Political Science
Functional level	Commission, European Parliament, Court of Justice	Empirical approach + theoretical limitations
Integration level	Economic (and some social) Public Policies	Integration theories

SOURCE: Author's elaboration

At this point it can be worth going back to the relation between cooperation and integration, as two different but related processes. Integration is a (qualitative) higher degree of Integration, in the sense that Integration needs a previous process of cooperation between the actors as a pre-requisite. In other words, Integration is a successful process of Cooperation. Although not all cooperation processes have the aim of further Integration, or can succeed in that direction.

Cooperation is a process in which different actors decide to put in common part or parts of its activities in order to achieve higher goals, while preserving their profiles, identities and functional prerogatives. They keep the possibility of splitting apart from the process from the beginning to the end. They do not lose their single profile and ultimate identity.

Integration is a process in which, after consistent previous cooperation, actors decide to create a new, qualitatively different entity, in which they invest substantial parts of their activities, and the outcome is a new actor. One of the landmarks to identify when a cooperation process becomes an integrated one has to do with becoming "irreversible". And this cannot be stayed only through a legal approach. In other words, from the functional viewpoint, it is very difficult for a candidate State to become a member of the European Union, very difficult in terms of legal an institutional standards, even more difficult in terms of the required set of macro-economic parameters, but it is *impossible* to get out of it, to leave, to quit. Of course, the Inter-Governmental approach says, rightly, that if the legal nature of the *UQCFO* depends on International Public Law, and it is expressed via Treaty, the Treaty provides a way to leave the process. The unilateral possibility of leaving a Treaty is still nowadays in the ultimate nature of International Public Law. But from a *functional and systemic approach*, it is simply not possible, hypothetically, to leave the EU. The degree of interdependence at the level of Integrated Policies makes it a non-plan.

As a last resort this was exactly the point where the American process had to decide between 1784 and 1787 what to do, once the conclusion was reached that the Confederation could not work. The whole issue of jumping from Confederation to a Federal State had to do with jumping from cooperation to integration, the concept of *irreversibility* being the landmark, the “point de non-retour”. When you become part of a Federal State, unilateralism is a concept which is not operational any longer.

As Morata (1999) points out, the EU process provided for years an irresistible power of attraction to economic and social elites, and this is crucial to understand the case. Any European Government, now or in the near future, depends on this functional constraint even in times of crisis, which does not derive only from the classic State obligations in international Treaties, or from formal choices in Foreign Policy based upon the assumption of state sovereignty. The global underlying trend at the European Level is stronger than the formal decision making process that, in theory, is still the prerogative of national Governments in Foreign Policy. None of the current challenges of our societies in our present times can be faced, managed (much less solved) at the national level only.

2.2. *One misunderstanding: A European political culture?*

One of the major current problems has to do with the construction of a *European political culture* upon which the continuation of the process will be possible (and without which, it will not: it is a historically proven case of a *sine qua non condition*). The elections to the European Parliament are always a contradictory phenomenon from this viewpoint. It is, and it is *perceived as*, a special *momentum*. Elites of different types (political, economic, social civic, media, opinion makers) get together and public opinion is supposed to be expecting explanations, proposals and prospects about the process. But it is also a moment in which the major contradictions and misunderstandings of the process become more and more visible. But the turnout in European elections declined in a sustained and constant manner since 1979 up to today. There is a “sustained disaffection” of this very weak or non-existent “European polity”.

In 1979 came the direct election to the European parliament, and at that time it was said (by European elites, broadly speaking) “since the European MP’s will be from now on elected *directly* by the voters, *therefore* it will become a genuine Parliament with the powers this implies on the field of Constitutional Law”. The (false) assumption was that by becoming more representative of European citizens (true), it will gain legislative powers to become a real Parliament (false). Why? In fact this debate has not been made at the institutional level, but it is interesting to note that there was a theoretical and conceptual confusion: the *representativity* of a Chamber is a different dimension than its institutional prerogatives in the field of

legislation and the field of controlling the executive (which are the three classic dimensions of a Constitutional Parliament: representation, legislation, control over the executive). There was also a political problem: the will of not opening the debate *from above*, that is, from the European institutions down to the public opinion. Nowadays the European Parliament is still a genuine representation of European citizenship, but continues to have fewer powers than those required to be *perceived as a real* Parliament. Of course, it gained prerogatives and responsibilities in the field of the so called *co-decision*, but the constitutional network still cannot be defined as responding to an acceptable division of powers.

Why? Because the balance still leans towards the predominance of the European Council, in terms of deciding (in the last stance) what extension of powers can be granted to the Parliament, how and when. This is more Inter Governmental than ever since 1992.

One of the consequences is, of course, the anomalies of electoral campaigns, of which the candidates label as “European” arguments, slogans or debates that are basically the same as national campaigns. This should be *nuanced*, because in some European countries where the cleavage pro-anti European is visible and transversal to the party system, there usually is a European dimension in the debates. But in countries (like Spain) where such cleavage is nonexistent or irrelevant, the anomaly is constant and growing, as well as something we could call *euro-distance* more than *euro-skepticism*.

We can see the candidates mentioning corruption, social Europe, Europe of nations (non-state nations), more Europe, etc. But we do not see the candidates really getting into the debate on how to solve *simultaneously* the problems linked to the enlargement, and the problems reforming the institutional framework (this is, the failure of Nice). We do not see political parties stating, as parties and candidates, their position on what to do with the Lisbon Treaty and its low profile, how to deal with the reform of the Commission and its relation to the Council, etc.

And most of all, there is a wide reluctance from the elites to explain to public opinion *the limits and the rhythm* of the European process. The call for more *political will* or to blame *the British* are not useful any longer, nor acceptable on academic grounds.

There is another approach. Let us explore the possibility according to which the current level (and the rhythms of construction) of the European Process is the one it can *objectively be*, nothing more, not faster. By defining it we clarify an issue: we are not at the gate of a new European government like a Federal State (“The United States of Europe”), a macro-federal state responding to the full logic of Constitutional Law and all its implications. To do so we must check if there is something like a *common European political culture*, meaning the set of civic, cultural and political values that a society needs from a historical prospective to allow (or to impose) the nation-state system. Our nation-states (Western European type) are the product of long, heterogeneous, diverse and contradictory historical processes. They

are not a legal construction only, and are not the product of a legal-political decision taken from above. So, the *export* operation of the formula from the nation-state level to the supranational level is not a process to be solved from Maastricht to Nice, from Nice to the unwise enlargement decision of 2004, and since 2010, with the Lisbon Treaty.

One should add that our nation-states are, for some of them, very heterogeneous in terms of plurinationalism (in the sense that Belgium or Spain are), some are federal and others are very centralized. And they have, all in all, very different *political cultures*, different approaches regarding the welfare state, taxes, accountability, and corruption in the public sphere. The reason why, for instance, many Danish people are *euro-reluctant*, is not that they are *ultra-nationalists*, or lean towards the extreme-right. It has to do with their perception of accountability of the Government, the way taxes are raised (with little fraud) and spent, as well as in Holland. And it has also to do with the perception of the distance between government and citizens. From this viewpoint my hypothesis is that there is some sort of a *common European political culture*, but not yet or not enough as the one required to settle the basis for a State-kind of political system, relating only with constitutional law and its institutional set. Of course, I was considering the problem only from the average of the fifteen pre-enlargement members. The political culture of the twelve new members, even if they have some common trends deriving from their past communist-imposed experience, will definitely be even far more complicated to integrate.

2.3. Another misunderstanding: A common Foreign Policy agenda?

Even though the agenda may be partly or potentially common, the policies are not. The (apparent) failure or weakness of a Common Foreign and Security Policy is one of the major misunderstandings of the current process, since we are expressing through it the confusion between analysis and wishful thinking. What are some of the features of European states in Foreign Policy?

Let us consider the issue only with fifteen members, before the enlargement (with a dozen of new members the contradictions may become exponential, but in a different way). Finland, Sweden, Ireland and, to some extent Denmark have a tradition of non-alignment or neutrality. United Kingdom is strongly or unconditionally Atlanticist (or pro-American). France not very much, Germany has been for four decades pro-American but has changed its agenda accordingly to the fall of the USSR, and has moved from an economic power under *tutelage* (during the bipolar world) to a European power pivotal to the EU process. The Italy of Berlusconi has a volatile Foreign Policy, Spain has made a turn (both under Mr. Zapatero and Mr. Rajoy), reversing the pro-Bush approach taken by Mr. Aznar regarding both the process of the European Union and the transatlantic link.

What is the *European Foreign Policy*? *The average of twenty seven Foreign Policies*? In fact, given the nature of the process at its current stage, it is, and can only be, the *minimum or lowest common denominator*, which in mathematics is not very much.

The reason has to be found in the fact that the European states, although facing a set of common interests, still have strong national agendas in Foreign Policy, historically deep rooted, culturally well accepted, and with extremely diverse priorities. And Foreign Policy is the basic policy by which a State relates to the international environment. In times of uncertainty the agenda usually becomes conservative, reluctant to innovation and changes, since radical changes are (or are perceived as) potentially additional factors of de-stabilization. And let's not forget this very old truth of International Relations: common values are one thing, national interest may be a different thing (and usually is), and Foreign Policy is conducted on the basis of national interest basically.

Of course, one could take for granted (although I think it is to be proved) that a unified Foreign Policy would be a factor of benefit, of stability. Europe represents (after the enlargement) about 500 million people, more than the United States and Russia together. If this is a strong international actor—and it is from a demographic as well as economic perspective—it should have *one* Foreign Policy. Yes, but to do so there is a requirement (not of a relative value, it is a pre-condition): *a political system of a State type*, in which the executive has the privilege of the monopoly of the decision, even if in a democratic state it is submitted to a set of external controls (parliament, public opinion, elections). The argument becomes very simple. The EU is a new kind of a political system, certainly, but it is not a State in the classical sense of the word, therefore the decision making processes and the monopoly of the decision becomes fragmented *per-se*. The state-members can of course have a common position on certain, some or many issues, but they cannot establish a common, long term, unified agenda. Let us think of a simple example: the Mediterranean agenda (under the light of the Barcelona Conference of 1995). France, Spain, Italy to some extent, have specific national agendas concerning specific parts of the Mediterranean. What do Finland, Ireland, and Denmark have for the Mediterranean? Certainly it is not a priority. All in all, they can afford a limited capacity of making declarations like the Barcelona Process. The performing capacity of which, at this point is not brilliant. Among other reasons, because in 1995 the Barcelona Conference overestimated its capacity of influencing crisis and conflicts, the parameters of which were either bilateral (Israel and Palestine) or depending on external actors (the United States). Furthermore, the Iraq crisis between the fall 2002 and June 2004 proved the superiority of the prerogatives of being a member of the Security Council at the UN (not to mention France and United Kingdom with the so-called “veto power”), including Spain, Germany, Chile or Mexico, than trying to reach a common EU position. On the other hand, the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean (or UPM) in 2008 is the most obvious example of a void initiative having

produced nothing in four years (except changing the Secretary General three times) and nobody being held accountable for it.

2.4. Trends (and Obstacles) to European Integration

As Morata (2000) points out, the analysis of the European system suffers from the limitations imposed by the concept (and theories of analysis) of the Nation-State, and its heritage of political centralization as well as economic concentration. There are two basic pillars of this phenomenon:

- a) The political and juridical legitimacy: the State continues to have the essential prerogatives of sovereignty, in particular towards any challenge coming from “above” (which would be represented not by *any* International Organization, but the ones –like the EU—that have a potential of *supranational integration* sufficient to put this superiority of the State at stake);
- b) The symbolic legitimacy (and the dynamics of a common identity which goes with it): *people* or *national community* are concepts which fit naturally with the State area of organization. Supra-State organizations cannot compete with the State (yet). This aspect of the problem has also to do with the weakness of a common European political or civic culture that we mentioned above.

But these assets of the State are contradicted by several trends working in the opposite way, according to Morata (2000):

- a) Economic globalization has underscored beyond any doubt the limits of the State sovereignty (as power to impose rules and controls) in the field of *economic sovereignty*. But in my opinion this does not reduce to zero the importance of the State when the moment comes to create and implement rules when the need for supranational or international agreements is inevitable. The interaction between States, supranational organizations (political or economic, or both: EU, Mercosur, NAFTA, ASEAN) and infra-State actors (regions, local Governments) is now a generalized phenomenon, and the EU has the most achieved example of it.
- b) New technologies and their multiple consequences.
- c) The crisis of the social (welfare) functions of the State, as well as the crisis of its distributive capacity.
- d) The tensions of identity fragmentation *within* the nation-state, with the persistence of cultural, linguistic and religious, diversity, the effect of which is the undermining its legitimacy.

From this perspective, to understand the ultimate nature and structures of the EU process (as a dynamic approach) we have to look at two more of its innovative aspects.

- a) The first one is the structural consolidation (both in terms of *process* and *institutions + rules*) of the *multilevel govern system*, by which any citizen's daily life, in terms of being governed, depends on how the Supra-state level, State-level, regional level (or member states in Federal States) and local government level interact and produce decisions. Of course, the basic problem here is how to reconcile the principle of hierarchy (of institutional levels and normative capacity of each of them) and the principle of distribution of competencies. But this is, in a way, a *federal symptom*; given that any Federal or even nonfederal advanced de-centralized systems have had to face it.
- b) The second one is the Europeanization of national policies (Closa, 1998). The limits, constrains and orientations that the EU process imposes on national policies is a general phenomenon, which seems to be *functionally irreversible*, although it continues to be formally *reversible*. It is also to be noted that these dynamics of Europeanization of national policies vary substantially from one policy to the other, with a generalization in the field of economic and social policies, as compared to the resistance found in the case of Foreign or Defense policies. The qualitative innovation here is not exactly that the dividing line between *national or domestic policy versus foreign policy* has been eroded to the extremes, for this has already been explored in the field of Foreign Policy analysis for a while. It is also that the States (this is: national governments) are at the same time more and more *managers-only* (in terms of implementing of different aspects of a supranational process), but also the only actors to decide about the rhythm of a further consolidation of this dynamics, how to slow down the process, how to accelerate it, or how or when to transfer additional powers to the EU institutional system. The general sequence from Maastricht to the so-called and failed Constitution of 2004, and from enlargement (2004) to the current Treaties (The Lisbon Treaty in 2010 and the 2012 new Budgetary and Fiscal Treaty) could be read as the increasing fear of national governments of going too fast towards an unbalanced modification of the current equilibrium between these two phases of the process.
- c) It is to be noted that the expansive trend to a *general Europeanization* of more and more (but not all) policies seems to confirm the EU as an irreversible process, and therefore the question of how to adapt the institutional and normative framework to the new system is only a matter of time. At the same time, the resistance of National (State Members) Governments to give more substantial sovereignty underlines more than ever the fundamental contradiction of the process.

A (preliminary and provisional) Conclusion

If we compare the conclusions on the EU Process with the initial hypothesis of the paper, it seems we have the confirmation of its main elements.

For instance, our community (in the broader sense of the term) pays attention to the issue, and it does so through its international activities of all formats. It is also visible when one looks at our publications, the diversity of topics, the level of specialization of our subdisciplines, etc. But if we look at it over the last two decades, we have been more reactive than proactive. The relationship between our academic tools (Political Science broadly speaking) and the object of our study and research (the world as a global political system) reflects the complex nature of the situation and is still quite dysfunctional.

This malfunction could become critical and the prospects of our prognosis or prospective capacity need a new impulse. If you add this structural problem to the legitimacy of “methodological pluralism” and also the academic micro fragmentation of our programs (both nationally and at a transnational level), we are in trouble. In order to counter this threat we must continue to adapt our academic work to the changing environment.

Within the two subdisciplines taken here as an example of a (relatively) positive response, Regionalism and Geopolitics can be considered a good example of this creative tension between a problematic situation and a window of opportunity for a re-assessment of our ideas and research tools.

And the Case Study of the EU Process underlines the need of awareness of our capacities, the possibility to overcome the malfunctions of a “bad use” of “methodological pluralism” or a “misleading interdisciplinarity”, but also the window of opportunity the real world (Europe in this case) offers to us. EU is a Process, but our discipline can use it as a boost to improve its capacities. In any case, we will have to continue to work on a trial-and-error basis, through case studies in order to turn our conclusions into theoretical improvement.

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(Note: These are some references which can be useful for a general approach to the issue. It is not a classic bibliography, and it does not pretend to be exhaustive.)

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