

# CHALLENGING THE LINEAR NARRATIVE OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: A CALL FOR REFLECTION



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**SUMMARY.** This paper philosophically explores the possible introduction of an alternative analytical approach to European integration. It is an invitation to reflect critically outside the mainstream paradigm. An extensive amount of scientific literature and research papers focuses on the EU, but it is quite easy to get lost amidst this stream of abundant writing. Meanwhile, the EU has been experiencing serious challenges since the previous enlargement, which has led to a broader definition of the “European project.” Numerous discussions have failed to deliver the expected results. It is an interesting paradox that the EU has been proposed globally as a model of peacebuilding in the context of the Nobel Peace Prize 2012. However, since then, no clearly defined model of internal EU integration has been implemented apart from some basic premises. The Monnet method has become formalized within the official framework of the EU, thus justifying top-down institutional engineering, which is contrary to the concept proposed by Jean Monnet. The paper offers a metaphorical reasoning as an intellectual counterbalance to the unreflective application of integrational models, thus enriching analytical and critical discourse.

**KEYWORDS:** metaphor, model, European Union, end of history, democracy, scientific method.

## INTRODUCTION

It is a common intellectual observation that certain specters are haunting Europe. As Philippe C. Schmitter bluntly put it, “to paraphrase Karl Marx (for the *n*th time), a (new) specter is haunting Europe – the specter of post-liberal democracy” (2006: 9). The whole project of the European Union aspired to preserve peace and democracy within Europe. Furthermore, peace outside the European Union has been expected to be promoted through an exemplary model of European integration combined with economic “soft power” and a conditionality package for potential (without any obligation to be accepted as actual) new member states. However, the recent Russian aggression against Ukraine has revealed certain contradictions between the EU’s formal institutional reasoning and the necessity to

react to ongoing atrocities in the neighborhood. It is noticeable that, since the EU has tried to keep the idea of peace within official narratives, the current crisis is stimulating a revisiting of the foundations of European integration. This means more than redefining a new normality – the EU must face present fundamental challenges if it is going to outlast as an institution. Is it reasonable to suppose that the necessity for peace, which helped to unite post-WWII Europe, needs to be reaffirmed or revised? The answer to this question is deeply interconnected to ongoing discussions about the definition of the EU as such and its possible future. Initially, the EU was always a top-down project instigated by the constant danger of the Cold War turning into WWII. The problem is that institutional engineering (as is true of any form of engineering) requires a formal model to be followed and a clearly defined hierarchy to implement the model of choice. Accurate modeling is indispensable to the understanding and shaping of social and political realities, but the danger of a model replacing reality is ever-present. No model is ideal, just parameters within models. Rational expectations driven by formal models do not necessarily coincide with irrationalities and subjectivities driven by real agents. As long as people comply with prevailing ideas or ideologies, the relevance of models may be reaffirmed even though a situation may always have been fragile. Two major claims of models, namely the representation of reality and the allegiance to objectivity, have frequently been contested. Political and social realities tend to be volatile in the absence of any predictive outcomes despite efforts to impose fixed structures on society or exploit tradition and religion in a manipulative way. Moreover, democracy itself is subject to numerous transformations throughout various phases and is in constant need of adjustment in light of re-emerging challenges by employing available creativity, critical thinking, and social/political analysis. Following Monnet's method, a crisis is a major driving force in terms of new reasoning. This paper invites us to reflect on mainstream political thinking from a philosophical and critical perspective. It criticizes a deterministic approach to the social realm, better known as "the end of history" narrative. The paper aims to explain the insufficiency of deterministic thinking that captivated a political framework in the second half of the 20th century.

#### THE PROBLEM OF THE *IDEAL*

For politically uninitiated readers, it can be quite easy to get lost in various debates on the forms of governance of the EU. Many take the idea of a European federation/confederation for granted and focus merely on studying existing obstacles that prevent their dreams from being fulfilled. However, a federation/confederation is

not the only option available in terms of future development. Intergovernmentalism is an explicit alternative to the supranational integration of the EU. It seems quite tempting to blend different approaches and celebrate a consensus almost in terms of a “European” fashion – “The European idea of a supranational union of peace could contribute to the vision of a supranational world union of peace, based on multilevel governance” (Bóka 2012: 396).

At the end of debates, whatever is left to define may be referred to as the unspecified “uniqueness” of the EU. The European peace project is justified by the post-WWII mythology of “never war again” as if history had started afresh in 1945. Not surprisingly, newly emerged “prophets” have come up with the idea of final achievement, e.g., the end of history. All good deeds must be finalized, otherwise political creeds are doomed. That is why mainstream thinking tends to hide existing confusion through denial – the form of governance in the EU is still far from ideal. The “ideal” in this case denotes the best performance possible. Such “idealization” of the EU mainly refers to a unique model of peacekeeping and governance. However, this kind of uniqueness may be quite misleading in the context of an institutional and political crisis because it distorts the analysis itself and eliminates available solutions. For example, democracy itself has been reinvented constantly since antiquity. Especially during a time of crisis, the process of reinvention is fostered to search for a viable solution. This is not a mere historical generalization; it has been induced as an ongoing contemporary practice. “Democracy as praxis, as a set of institutions, regulations, and legal guarantees defined and confined by the sovereign nation-state faces fundamental challenges and is already on the way to deep transformation” (Mizslivetz & Jensen 2013: 42).

This is the biggest illusion of modernity and progress – the illusion of a fixed Final Outcome or Final Method. The idea of the Final Method precludes a critical assessment of current political and institutional practices, especially ones embedded in formal hierarchies. Bureaucracy mainly refers to the authority of experts and clarity of formal procedures that presuppose political detachment or unbiased objectivity. On the other hand, language possesses an ambiguous property – it can serve as a mode of communication and a formalized barrier to entry against outsiders. It is one of the basic functions of formal language. Institutional formalisms are embedded to keep institutions running smoothly. However, their alleged sensitivity to external influences and biases has sustained the exclusive group of “initiated ones,” i.e., unelected officials and experts that hold to mainstream thinking and practices. This mainstream thinking resembles a system of beliefs in progress and development, which can be driven by almost mechanical rules once suitable initial conditions are set. It presupposes linear cause-effect relations and developmental growth throughout specified stages. This kind of evolutionary model fosters

predictive calculations and formal analysis in terms of so-called objectivity. Sadly, this can end in a self-sustaining vicious circle that converts objective rationality into a pseudo-theological endeavor. In this case, all critical thinking and revision efforts are treated as no more than friction within a framework of “rational machinery”. A mechanical approach considers society as a social and political mechanism that can be managed and maintained according to technical manuals written in the head office. Unfortunately, for a significant period, the EU has been captivated by institutional engineering and a progressive creed in terms of European peace and prosperity. The concept of the EU was positioned as a higher stage of political and economic evolution that would steer Europe towards eternal peace. However, despite the numerous achievements of the EU, the historical legacy of earlier precursors should not be neglected. A discrepancy between declarative content and formal practices has pushed the initial idea of the EU into a more abstract or detached realm. “Progressive arrogance” can induce a dreadful and analytically misleading method. The search for new forms of governance should not simply be a goal that justifies the current situation. Excessive preoccupation with formal procedures opens the floodgates for a new institutional crisis. Social reality is not submissive to a certain mechanism driven by a political impetus from a single point of influence, be it Brussels, Paris, or Berlin. While the EU struggles with institutional idealization, it is imperative to preserve integrational processes in touch with human agency.

#### UNDEFINED METAPHOR

The opening speech by Jacques Delors at the Intergovernmental Conference on September 9, 1985, is still very much relevant to current European issues. Jacques Delors warned about the EU remaining an UPO – an unidentified political object – stating, “For we must face the fact that in 30 or 40 years, Europe will constitute a UPO – a sort of unidentified political object – unless we weld it into an entity enabling each of our countries to benefit from the European dimension and to prosper internally as well as hold its own externally” (1985: 8). The year 2017 was an ideal threshold to evaluate achievements over the previous 40 years, as it became a year of “final definition” following the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. According to old political tradition, a time for celebration provides an excellent opportunity to test certain outcomes of ongoing contemplations. It was a political-intellectual provocation by the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, who publicly delivered five possible future scenarios for the EU and opened an official debate (European Commission 2017). The old idea of a

multi-speed Europe as one of the possible scenarios had resurfaced once more (de La Baume 2017, Münchau 2017, Zalan 2017). After just one week, the leaders of Germany, France, Italy, and Spain (the four largest economies in the EU) also publicly welcomed this proposal. “Multi-speed Europe” was positioned as a third solution, a sort of compromise that should appease the debate between proponents of a Federal Europe and a decentralized Europe with recourse to enhanced cooperation.

However, a fundamental problem regarding the form of governance of the EU (or the definition of an entity) has yet to be resolved. Of course, many achievements are available now, especially quantifiable ones – the number of treaties and agreements signed, regulations issued, new member states accepted, etc. On second thought, is it a problem of final definition that needs to be resolved for European integration? Although formal language and rational mentality are mainly preoccupied with clearly defined notions, clarity is just a pretentious facade of institutional bureaucracy that seeks to regulate social and political realities. Hierarchical top-down engineering is failing due to its inability to grasp anything other than mechanical and formal procedures. The current issues of the EU have been predetermined in the institutional priorities listed in the opening speech by Jacques Delors (1985). An emphasis was placed on a strong economic dimension as if it had been a major consolidator of Europe through the Common Market. Jacques Delors (1985) described four essential prerequisites for the EU in the future as a coherent and interdependent whole: 1) a large internal market; 2) technology-serving productive capacity and social life; 3) economic and social cohesion; and 4) monetary capacity. Without a doubt, many declarative points regarding the environment, culture, and science have been made, but a major goal was to create an efficient economic entity throughout Europe. The efficient market mechanism, as simply the ideal parameter of rational modeling, is insufficient to maintain the European project and guarantee “the European dimension and to prosper internally as well as hold its own externally”. A social dimension, with a fully pledged commitment, is also an essential prerequisite for the EU. In the absence of any social responsibilities and accountabilities, the EU may be considered an unstable entity prone to collapse. This consideration may seem too alarmist, but it helps to emphasize existing defects of the positivist paradigm. Metaphorical reasoning counteracts reductionist and deterministic frameworks by expanding interpretative space for further analysis.

A metaphor is not only a figure of speech used for rhetorical effect in literature or language. Umberto Eco (1986) introduced a metaphor as a valuable cognitive tool. The complexity of metaphors is both a source of clarity and vagueness. This interplay between clarity and vagueness is subject to interpretation, which can be a challenge for those who value truth functions. Such interpretability is not related

to a neutral description of independent data, where a sign denotes something that has been specified exactly. The representation of the EU in strictly formal and legal terms not only reveals the engineering nature of this institution but also misleads decision-makers. Umberto Eco made a relevant distinction between practical and engineering powers, which implies the difference between philosophy and science as follows: “A philosophy cannot, however, be true in the sense in which a scientific description (even though depending on previous philosophical assumptions) is said to be true” (1986: 10–11). Philosophy has a practical power because it contributes to real changes, whereas engineering power is based on the predictability of the world described in formal language. A metaphor is not just an ornament of language, it is an instrument of knowledge (Eco 1986: 89). Interpretations provoked by metaphors move the observer beyond the mere perception of the similarities between things. As emphasized by Umberto Eco, a metaphor that describes what is already known is insufficiently cognitive (1986: 121). The engineering mindset is deeply related to the paradigm of developmental progress. The idea of development presupposes a certain continuity in time, in other words, a “properly” described present as a reference point for future predictions or historical explanations. On the contrary, a metaphor can introduce an analogy irrespective of the classic time-space framework, for example, in terms of a utopian setting or non-linearity.

The utopian (as well as non-linear) projection is free from the present ballast of necessity to improve the current situation and can be regarded as a “rebellion against these crystallized and perverted institutions and social practices” (Hertzler 1965: 259). It is somewhat of a privilege and advantage not to be framed by the concept of continuous development, hereby extending and deepening the pool of potential ideas. Of course, numerous utopias with irrelevant and idealistic contents exist, but it is flawed to expect that the present world is the optimum and relies on probability calculus. Lewis Mumford has distinguished between the utopias of escape and reconstruction (1928: 15). His observation is still considered to be very profound and modern: “an idea is a solid fact, a theory is a solid fact, a superstition is a solid fact as long as people continue to regulate their actions in terms of the idea, theory, or superstition; and it is none the less solid because it is conveyed as an image or a breath of sound” (Mumford 1928: 14). Following this line of thought, a critical approach to the positivist architecture of the EU is relevant concerning the Utopia of Escape. As a result, repetitive inconsistencies of the positivist paradigm are identified as a certain “uniqueness” of the European project. The mysterious terms, such as “unidentified political object” or “postmodern polity”, accommodate reality to the existing models, thus distorting a representation. As an alternative, Jan Zielonka’s (2010) suggestion to introduce the notion of an empire improves the analytical toolkit metaphorically. “I use the term ‘neo-medieval

empire' exactly to emphasize that the EU's ways of organizing governance and projecting power abroad are not unique but have been tried in previous stages of European history, even though in an entirely different socio-political context" (Zielonka 2010: 17). The idea is to utilize historical comparisons in identifying basic analytical benchmarks.

The existing heterogeneity makes uniform general rules almost impossible. Similarly, it is inappropriate to construct strict algorithms for complex realities. Positivist value-free premises can hide the most dangerous sources of regressive bias. The EU has something to learn from medieval actors in justifying policies according to values and norms (Zielonka 2010: 150). All in all, it can be a valuable source of inspiration for handling various implications concerning the future development of the EU. Metaphorical language is also being abused within political discourse, but none of the philosophical ideas are secure from manipulative exploitation. Deterministic modeling can provide a useful analytical and cognitive toolkit too if properly applied (Klein, Marx & Fischbach 2018). Models are delivered to explain the emergence on the macro level when specific micro premises are supplied. The problem is the *intermezzo* level (in between) consisting of social complexity to which theories of everything tend to succumb (Barrow 2007). This is a reason why the scientific and political mindset prefers modeling as the most convenient way to reduce and simplify complexity. A philosophical proposal to involve a metaphor expands the available pool of ideas and sustains democratic discourse.

#### THE LIMITS OF SCIENTIFIC ACCOUNT AND THE END OF HISTORY

Ideas move people to transcend current situations, although they may lead to closed rational systems of thought which can be identified as phony intellectualism that is permeated with fake dynamics and includes distorted representations of the past and inadequate synthesis (Mannheim 1954). But a conservative mentality is no less innovative than a progressive one because orthodoxy can exert practical control in an efficient "rationalizing" way. So, true intellectual effort should maintain an adequate level of criticism of social determinism and imposed finitude, thereby securing public space as a creative provider of alternative ideas. "A demand for an absolute, permanent synthesis would, as far as we are concerned, mean a relapse into the static worldview of intellectualism" (Mannheim 1954: 135). The lack of self-reflection ends up in a closed loop because "under certain circumstances, nothing contains more irrational drive than a fully self-contained, intellectualistic worldview" (Mannheim 1954: 197). The risk of "intellectualism" could also be identified with that of "scientism" (Popper 2008) or "systems thinking" (Holland 2015).

Premise-dependent thinking evolved conjointly with Hegelianism and industrialization in the 19th century. Universalist philosophy placed universal concepts as the antecedent to the existing particularities. The idealist philosophy of Plato referred to ideas outside of time and space, which made it impossible to specify the realm except in terms of poetry and myth. To overcome this, Hegel and his followers redefined time with a new speculative interpretation that exercised a long-term influence on modern political and social thought. According to Alexandre Kojève (1980: 134), proper human time is historical as “in the Time of which Hegel speaks, on the other hand, the movement is engendered in the Future and goes toward the Present by way of the Past: Future → Past → Present (→ Future)”. Following Walter T. Stace about Aristotelian logics, the time priority was replaced by the logical priority, therefore, “the premises have logical priority over the conclusion...the end of a thing is prior to the thing; or in general, the end of the world-process is prior to the world” (1955: 20–21). That presupposes a teleological process containing the idea – both as a craved result and initial premise – within the Hegelian framework. It makes the similarity between logic and ideology more than just orthographical. Now, Francis Fukuyama (1992) has attempted to combine liberal democracy and the homogenous state by projecting a temporal point of convergence – the end of history. In his pretentious Hegelian account, the idea of the homogenous state has oscillated from a claimed projection to an alleged rational premise. Therefore, the present rests in the intermediary phases that need to be rearticulated to achieve a final stage of evolution. The foundational mythology of the EU has been tested with many philosophical and political accounts. The end of history has combined liberal democracy and the scientific method into a universal homogeneity of statehood. For the EU, such a program of historical development simply means the reduction of existing complexity to the ideal type of super-statist governance. After such a theoretical operation, political varieties simply disappear as imperfections beyond the constructed model of “scientific democracy”.

The scientific explanation includes a set of established causal links confirmed by their predictive capacity. The applications of scientific methods still contain the implicit assumption of universality adopted from the natural sciences, which include the “omniscient” detached observer and “omnipresent” foreseeable regularities. Francis Fukuyama’s *Universal History* has referred to the universal scientific method being applied both in the natural and social realms. “And once discovered, the progressive and continuous unfolding of modern natural science has provided a directional mechanism for explaining many aspects of subsequent historical development” (Fukuyama 1992: 73). Nevertheless, social inquiry has been constantly in conflict with the “value-free” approach, thus involving issues of bias, geographically localized exceptions, and so on (Redman 1993, Addleson 1995, Wallerstein



2001). Even physics has been engaged in epistemological dialogue with interpretative or contextual discourse on causality and its possible implications for the social sciences (Weinert 2005, Filk 2019). Scientific knowledge has a limited (not absolute) correspondence with reality, which means that some of the epistemic voids must be taken into consideration. It opens a certain space for interpretation that encloses premise-based modeling only for specified functionalities that possess neither universal validity nor universal predictability. Regarding social reality, such an epistemic void may be prone to ideological determination in terms of establishing new certainties. The predictive capacity of the social sciences (what persists within the close range of probability or speculative thought) and universal validity (what is just another unfulfilled dream of Theory-of-Everything (Barrow 2007)) being incorporated into an evolutionary Hegelian framework with ideological content gives a captivating sense of “final revelation.” This is an ideological swamp for many intellectuals who claim expertise in social development and for their audience, which craves a “solid” societal foundation. The insufficient predictive capacity and distorted understanding of universal validity corrupt the possible applications of the scientific method due to biased representations. In this regard, the reliance on “value-free” legitimation does not necessarily explain the functioning of liberal democracy and polity. On the contrary, it puts in jeopardy the basic principles of democracy and social development. Francis Fukuyama’s case displays the limits of scientific scope and the importance of social complexity that the mechanistic approach tends to dismiss. The previously cited mechanism of directional development can gain logical autonomy from every set of values related to ideology, religion, ethics, etc. The European project is in continuous development, and it needs broken linearity to be secured from the dead-ends as well.

## CONCLUSION

This distinguished thought is the best available concluding remark – “There are crimes of passion and crimes of logic” (Camus 1991: 3). The European project and the scientific method can be equally abused by crimes of logic. However, none of them are immune to the crimes of passion in terms of abuse as well. The concept of directional historical development is based on the logical necessity of proceeding from one phase to another. It implies a mechanism of change that refers to an initial set of premises. This explains how rational machinery is set loose in independent existence. Of course, this independence is controversial as far as many approaches are considered. The scientific method presupposes a detached worldview, in mainstream terms, but it is susceptible to hidden bias. Certainly, the alleged objectivity

sometimes is nothing else but an instrumental way to impose governed inevitability. This way, even the idea of progress is institutionalized; it has been appropriated by the states as a function of the system. The blind replication of such thinking is counterproductive on the European supranational level. It is not about the never-ending debate between the proponents of statist Europe or federal Europe. The main emphasis should be on the readiness of the EU as an institution to respond to the crisis – the available pool of options must be freed from the business-as-usual paradigm.

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#### IŠŠŪKIS LINIJINIAM EUROPOS INTEGRACIJOS NARATYVUI: KVIETIMAS REFLEKSIJAI

**SANTRAUKA.** Šiame straipsnyje filosofškai nagrinėjamas galimas alternatyvus analitinis požiūris į Europos integracijos procesus, siekiant praplėsti mūsų supratimą apie Europos Sąjungos (ES) plėtrą. Tai yra kvietimas kritiškai refleksijai už pagrindinės paradigmos ribų. Yra daugybė mokslinių publikacijų ES tematika, tačiau tarp jų lengva pasiklysti. Per pastaruosius metus ES patyrė rimtų iššūkių, dėl kurių į „Europos projektą“ pradėta žvelgti platesniu mastu. Nepaisant daugybės diskusijų, vidinės ES integracijos modelis lieka sunkiai apibrėžiamas ir įgyvendinamas, apsiribojama tik pagrindinėmis prielaidomis. Instituciškai formalizuotas Monnet metodas tapo institucinės inžinerijos „iš viršaus į apačią“ įkaitu, kas prieštarauja Jeano Monnet pasiūlytai koncepcijai. Šiuo straipsniu siūlomas metaforinis samprotavimas kaip intelektinė atsvara nereflektiviam integracinių modelių taikymui, taip praturtinant analitinį ir kritinį diskursą. Kad ir kaip būtų paradoksalu, ES suteikta 2012 metų Nobelio taikos premija šiuo metu nesustiprina integracinio naratyvo, vyravusio po Antrojo pasaulinio karo. Todėl būtina peržiūrėti esamus integracijos modelius ir ieškoti naujų alternatyvų, kad būtų užtikrinta ES sėkminga ateitis.

**RAKTAŽODŽIAI:** metafora, modelis, Europos Sąjunga, istorijos pabaiga, demokratija, mokslinis metodas.