

Social and Political Implications of the Disintegrated European Union¹

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Abstract

Since its inception, the European Union (EU) has been continuously transforming itself to an ever increasing Union based on shared peace, democracy and security. The transformation of the EU from an economic entity towards a larger political union rests on setting up normative values around democracy, equality, social justice, political freedom, human rights etc. which strengthen the EU to a greater extent. These Intrinsic values of the EU act as glue and get entrenched into the socio-political fabric of its member states. However, in the wake of debt crisis 2008 and the recent Brexit episode, skepticism surfaces around disintegration of the EU and an imminent democratic deficit among member states. Further, the continuous pressure of immigration on member states along with a feeble transatlantic relation reinforces such perception among social scientists.

In the last few years, the external and internal pressure - socio-political, economic or otherwise in nature and growing euro-skepticism, raising existential concerns about EU, have been increasingly discussed in various quarters of the intelligentsia and political leadership. The disintegration of EU as anticipated in various quarters, if is realized, will open a Pandora's box, create a vacuum in the space currently filled by EU, and may start another round of race and initiate a chain reaction among the world actors to bring the present member countries into their own sphere of influence thus, creating new set of social, economic, political and security challenges.

However, this paper holds that an anticipated disintegration of the EU is a delusional concept because of the nature of the EU that posits itself as a normative actor based on humanitarian values rather than values of a realist state. The paper therefore, seeks to study various intrinsic values of the European Union that hold the EU together despite several crisis over

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the decades. The paper further explores the implications of such factors on the socio-political fabric of member states in the EU. The paper also explores the contemporary situation in the EU with respect to its integration process vis a vis related geopolitical crisis in the region.

The paper therefore addresses the following questions:

1. What is the purpose of an integrated EU?
2. What are the factors which have strengthened the existence of an integrated EU?
3. What implications such factors have on the socio-political system of European member states?
4. What could be the possible implications of a disintegrated EU on the entire Europe in particular and the world in general, if it happened?

INTRODUCTION

The word 'Europe' comes from 'Europa', daughter of Phoeician king, from Greek mythology. Herodotus, the Greek author as early as in 5th Century B.C. referred the landmass lying north of Mediterranean as Europa. For several centuries, Europe has remained clad with war. In the 2nd World War alone 55 million people had lost their lives and in the aftermath it broke into two halves – Western and Eastern Bloc. Immediately after the WW II there was an attempt to unite the two traditional rivals – France and Germany and in the process the effort was made to realize the age old, from the times of Greek and Romans, utopian idea of a united Europe.

This idea of a united Europe was put forward by French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, on 9 May, 1950 which got materialized a year later when European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was formed in 1951 and a few years later in 1958 when the European Economic Community (EEC), was established by collective initiative of six European nations viz., Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Today, more than 500 million people inhabit Europe in 28 member states of EU, constituting 8% of the world population.

Such long history of peace and tranquility is altogether a new experience for Europe – It's been 70 years now that Europe has not seen a war. And, all the achievements in a world

which has been continuously facing armed conflict, more than 40 in last 70 years has been fought with 170.000 lives lost every year. In this context, Jean-Claude Juncker, the European Commission President says ‘sometimes we fight. But we use words. And we settle our differences at the negotiating table, not in the trenches.’ Eventually, the European Union was awarded Nobel Peace prize for promoting peace, democracy, human rights, etc. in 2012. EU successfully brought peace and stability to the otherwise war torn Europe.

In order to establish Europe as an integrated force, a single unit, the EU bestows on its citizens, who simultaneously enjoys citizenship of the EU member states, certain unique set of rights viz., (i) to commute freely across member states, settle, and work without any border control including in non-member states of Norway, Iceland, and Switzerland. This area as a whole is known as Schengen Area; (ii) Right to vote and contest elections to the European Parliament from the native state; (iii) Right to assistance if one belongs to an EU member state on visiting outside Europe from any member countries’ embassy; (iv) Right to seek remedy from European Ombudsman if one has been wronged by any EU official, (v) Right to initiate a legislative proposal on any urgent public matter of immediate concern provided the same has been seconded/supported by one million people from EU member state; (vi) free movement of goods, services, labour and capital across member states etc. Beside these, the European Union has evolved effective mechanism for coordination among different bodies such as Police or civil administration. Also, Students of member states enjoy the right to study anywhere within EU, for which their diplomas and employment certificates have been made acceptable across the Union. Efforts are continuously made to improve people’s life standard, promote peace and stability across Europe.

Most importantly, as a result of application of such common set of laws, rights, privileges and duties, a certain unique set of common values are imbibed and internalized by people of these member states, which may together be termed as ‘Europeanisation’. Thus, a common European value evolves which is more or less universalized in its outlook and agenda. This European value finds itself a place in every decision EU takes externally or even internally. The presence of a supranational authority plays a key facilitator’s role in promoting such values. These values could be enlisted as rule of law,

democracy, human rights, civil liberties, sustainable development, free market etc. Thus, the EU is not only concerned with foreign and security policy around the realist concerns as far as its international affairs are concerned, but engages in a variety of areas such as developmental concerns, trade, world economy, migration policies, climate and energy agendas etc.

EU as Normative Power

It was Ian Manners, who first proposed and popularized EU as 'Normative power'. (2002). Manners claimed that EU enjoys a unique and special place in the globe because of its ability to persuade others by lending its own values. EU is a distinct actor who can help transcend the anarchic and self-centered or unruly behavior of nation-states and make them adopt the rule of law and other democratic values (Manners 2002, p.240). Manners (2002, p. 252) contends that the source of such EU's ability to persuade others emanate intrinsically as well as extrinsically i.e. one, EU first plays a part of role model through the member states and second it persuades others through its policies. Thus, Manners further contends that EU can "shape conceptions of 'normal' in international relations" (Manners 2002, p. 239). He sees EU's constitution as elite driven, treaty based, legal order thus, lending it an identity and behavior which are based upon a common set of values (Manners 2002, p. 241). Some of those values could be enlisted here as peace, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, human rights, social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development, good governance etc. (Manners 2002; Manners 2008). These values form its core which gets reflected while formulating external policies. Moreover, use of such values in international diplomacy sets EU apart from its counterpart whose decisions and agendas are mostly concerned with the realist or neo-realist interest and whose security concerns are foremost and prevail over other ethical concerns (Hyde-Price 2008, p. 30).

Catherine Ashton, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs of EU in 2012 observed that human rights are "a silver thread that runs through everything we do in external relations" (Ashton, 2012). Academicians more or less concur that national and EU leaders view the Union as a force for good in the international system (Aggestam 2008, p. 1; Hyde-Price 2008, p. 29; Sjursen 2006, p. 236). Important founding documents of EU such as The Treaty of

Amsterdam, the Treaty of Lisbon, the Maastricht Treaty and European Security Strategy, vividly mentions Human Rights as a strategy and objective. Beside these documents other discursive practices among EU support the idea of it having a normative identity.

Smith (2001, p. 188) demonstrates this case by citing various implements which facilitates EU in promoting such norms, such as the use of positive and negative conditionality while signing agreements with parties, and using the tools like development assistance, and bilateral dialogues. Such use of these tools suggest EU's conscious effort to be a normative power. Here, EU's talk with North Korea could be cited as an example of such norm-lending behavior. Whereas, other actors while engaging with North Korea tend to remain within realist agenda and are mostly interested in talking the security issues like nuclearisation of Korean peninsula the EU vocalized the concerns over human rights (Lee 2012, pp. 49-51). This indicates that EU is not bound by any traditional parameter but it freely brings in its fresh perspective and tries to engage parties on several ideational ground.

The norm-exporting approach of EU in its international relations is particularly obvious when it advocates for international law. A key to distinguish a normative power from traditional players who support such institutions for pursuing their own interest is support for such international legal regime which bind individuals and state actors to certain international legal and human rights norms (Sjursen 2006, p. 244; Barbé and Johansson-Nogués 2008, p. 81). One such example which helping to establish EU's normative identity could be from its African policy where it encouraged African nation-states to join International Criminal Court for trial of war criminals those who were accused of crime against humanity (Schiepers and Sicurelli 2008, p. 611). Moreover, further assistance was provided to states who adopted the ICC. The promotion of ICC was adopted as stated objective of EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in 1998.

An analysis of benefits of joining EU

For accession into the EU the applicant state needs to agree to a plethora of provisions led down in the *acquis communautaire* which is a compilation of a complete legislation, documented and collated in last 5-6 decades and forms the basic criteria for joining EU. It is

spread over 35 chapters which includes provisions related to free movement of people, goods, services, capital; sectoral policies, Small and Medium Enterprises related policies, Regional Policies, Single monetary Union, Justice and Home affairs, beside others which lay basis for negotiations between the EU and the candidate states

Benefits accruing out of accession are not limited to economy but are multidimensional in nature and would include: economic, political, and cultural aspects. The benefits may include evolution of legal and institutional machineries and their standards thus enlarging the scope of freedom of choice for consumers, as well as producers, leading to an overall improvement in standard of life.

The following table prepared by Aristidis P. Bitzenis and Andreas Andronikidis well represents costs and benefits of member states for accession.

Advantages From Being An EU Member	Costs For Being An EU Member
Enhancement of market opportunities (increased market)	The costs of adoption of all EU norms and standards by enterprises Reduction
Reduction of trade barriers or even elimination of either tariff or non-tariff barriers	Migration issues – Increased Criminality
Reduction of business cost	Fear that the highly skilled would emigrate from the accession countries to the EU (15)
Reduction of costs of new market entry	Fear that the enlargement will encourage the relatively unskilled to leave the accession countries to take up employment in the EU (15)
Free movement of employers/employees across borders to find and take up employment	Fear that the wages would be depressed in the EU(15)
Strengthening of international accounting standards	Fear that the unemployment would rise in the EU(15)
Transparency in business operations and business performance	For example, the Norway reluctance towards membership is related to the perceived

	compromise of Norwegian identity with a constant struggle for political independence, society and highly subsidized welfare model and broad and diverse EU community.
Facilitation of business operations by increasing the intensity of competition.	Challenges for the poorest of the EU member states such as Greece, Spain, and Portugal due to Structural Funds adjustments perspective
High growth rates	Enlargement negative impact on Spain and other weak EU (15) economies from trade, FDI, migration and Structural /cohesion Funds adjustments perspective
Peace and stability	Costs for improvement of legislature
More FDI and trade flows through enlargement	Costs of compliance with European principles.
Faster growth of consumer incomes (due to GDP growth)	Costs for total modernisation of the industrial potential.
Stabilization and strengthening of institutions	Deteriorate security and EU resources (require vast resources and coordination of policies, needs establishment of bridge gaps in economic development while alleviating structural discrepancies by subsidizing infrastructure and agricultural reform but “even with modifications to the present European institutions, a larger and more diverse European Union is likely to be a weaker union).
Increased administration capabilities and respect for the rule of law	Fears for losing economic advantages, and compromising culture standards, religion and tradition.
Exploitation of the wage cost advantages in	Threats to domestic producers’ market

central and eastern European countries (CEECs)	position. Loss of market share for local companies and especially for the SMEs due to the increased competition, and the participation of foreign companies.
Greater international integration and policy cooperation	The transition costs can be very high for weak countries with bad /weak economies and environments.
Improvement of investment climate and business environment	Greek and producers from other weak economies will need to import new equipment and technologies from advanced countries such as Germany and France. This extra cost may lead to a decrease of the producer surplus.
Better regulations to start up and more predictable investment decisions and business operations, avoidance of bureaucratic and selective behaviour of administration in obtaining licenses	Many of the EU businesses attach higher risks to invest in the accession countries due to weaknesses in the business infrastructure both the “hard” infrastructure but, especially, the “soft” business environment.
Easier Technology transfer	For example, the French are against compromising French independence and possible integration of countries that they are not European in essence, such as Turkey.
New markets will provide new ideas for CEEC entrepreneurs	EU benefits are already achieved for the EU applicant countries before their entrance
Strengthen company management and capital markets	advanced countries may pay “the fine tuning” of the weak countries for several years
Countries will not deal with different trade regimes and custom regulations	another kind of bureaucracy may exist in the European union context (a centralized system)
Challenges from Structural and Fund eligibility for the new EU members	There is no exit from the European union

Some of the benefits as per Viner(1950) and Meade (1955) accrued as a result of accession to the EU, are: (1) Improvement of the quality of life and standards of living. (2) Reduction of prices of goods, due to the existence of free market. (3) Decrease of the risk for business by fostering macroeconomic, legal and political stability. (4) Increase of trade and capital flows (5) Use of efficient methods of production, by the integration of new technologies, whose cost is subsidized partially by the EU. (6) Improvements of hard and soft infrastructure by the structural funds given to country-members.

Numerous studies demonstrate that member countries after a brief period of stabilization, register a rapid growth in income and productivity (Gács, 2003; Małkowski and Próchniak, 2007; Cuaresma et al, 2008; Rapacki and Próchniak, 2009). In addition to these economic benefits scholars suggest other benefits too in the area of democratisation, administrative efficiency, the cutting of corruption, and positive socialisation effects (Grabbe, 2006).

Current Issues and challenges to the EU

The anticipation around the disintegration of the EU revolve around various reasons: as the crisis during 2008 unfolded, it fragmented not only the financial flows, but also weakened the EU economy, eroded political support for strengthening crisis ridden states like Greece, Spain, Portugal etc. resulting into antagonistic feelings among the EU members. The recent refugee crisis, along with overburdening migratory flows into European borders and internal adjustments within various European countries raising similar concern about EU's institutional governance in keeping its integrity intact. Moreover, with the unveiling of Brexit episode, the skepticism looms large over the stronghold of the EU over its long term sustainability. Externally, the increasing concern for lack of EU normative power with respect to influencing geo politics like its diminishing influence vis a vis that of China, Russia, BRIC powers etc. both commercially and politically raises the eyebrows among international relations thinkers.

Besides, the inherent democratic deficit within the EU with respect to most of the EU citizens feeling increasingly remote from the EU decision making and complain about a lack of democratic accountability adds on to the flavour of disintegration process of the EU.

Together with this, complexities and delay in the institutional reform has put the enlargement of the EU in a halt as is being evident from the recent failure of Sofia summit where due commitment to open the gate for accession for Balkan countries did not meet the expected commitment from the EU leaders leading to more tensions in the region.

While the disintegration of the EU is quietly being anticipated by few political thinkers and leaders, there is still widespread public acceptance that such disintegration may have a devastating effect over economic, social and political base of the European nations and a huge cost may be born out by the stakeholders if disintegration appears on the horizon. One of many anticipated problems may be that a break up of the Euro-area may lead to unleashing forces of populism and xenophobia and establish political hegemony across the Union. Extreme nationalism may further seek to claim their authority over territorial borders, along with conflict within ethnic identities. It may also unleash a possible race of influence building among the newly created nations however, on a different plain due to rise of China, as an important international actor and fall of Soviet Union. This might lead to a struggle for progressive or regressive alternatives within that vacuum left by EU.

However, this paper holds that the European disintegration never seem inevitable. The EU may apparently seem vulnerable and in danger of disintegration considering the numbers of blows it received over the last few years, however, considering the values it holds and its *raison d'être* that glued all the European countries together, such a notion of disintegration seems delusional. Since its inception the EU has expanded itself from 6 founding members to a wide wagon of 29 countries and still on the ever increasing process of enlargement where no countries who have ever joined, left the Union except the UK that disrupted the EU's uniformity. Moreover, the UK was always looked by other members with suspicion, it could never accept a full membership. The EU glue has tied together its member states quite strong. This strength of the EU rests on its inherent values and principles that it projects internally and externally and therefore create a distinct purpose for its existence in the long run. Unlike a realist state that relies mostly upon the values of self interests, survival and exerting power over others, the EU seeks to influence through mutual cooperation, shared values of community and shared interests of involved states. Its supremacy lies not only in the supranational structure that it holds but in its ability of holding mutual power that the EU

shares with its member states. Moreover, the disintegration of EU is not in favour of any market economy including China, as EU as a single entity provides one large market and smoothen the bureaucratic and administrative process which otherwise would pass through every individual country. Further, EU, as a supranational entity provides a bargaining power and a platform to pursue national interests on various international platforms, to otherwise tiny nation states from Central, East and Southern European nations whose national interest would otherwise be lost somewhere. Therefore, the integration of the EU will prevail at least for some time in the near future despite all the adversities.

Conclusion:

While speculating over an anticipated disintegration, this paper holds that in order to counter anticipated forces of disintegration, the EU must do less and do it better. Economically, the EU should plan bringing new reforms within its institutional structure and make it more democratic. The political leaders of the EU need to restore trust among its citizens specially workers who are one of the most important pillar of EU who have been voting against EU membership because of their disenchantment with EU, decision making should be made more democratic and transparent. Politically, the EU should emphasize over effective cooperation in combating terrorism as its creating fear psychosis among Europeans. Further, rather than trying to force recalcitrant governments to accept unwanted refugees, EU authorities should pursue an orderly and safe resettlement program with willing governments. This is particularly important in view of the uncertain fate of the EU's deal with Turkey to curb refugee inflows, which is looking increasingly precarious in the wake of recent failed coup. Finally, the EU leaders need to wake up to the needs and interests of contemporary European society and resolve any pertinent crisis. With disintegration looming, the least the EU political leaders could do, is to demonstrate the citizens and the member states about ample possibilities to flourish together in an ever-closer union and to make the anxious Europeans know that the benefits of the EU integration outweigh its costs of disintegration at any times.

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