The Post-enlargement European Order: Europe ‘United in Diversity’?

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Abstract
The enlargement of the European Union has led to the increase of diversity within the European area. While the project of enlargement can be understood as one in which the European Union has sought to defend a singular, common, and exclusive understanding of European identity (a ‘Fortress Europe’), the combined process of enlargement and constitutionalization can be seen to have ultimately contributed to an opening up as well as a rendering more contingent of the European project. While in one sense enlargement can be seen as sustaining the element of unity in the official motto of ‘unity in diversity’, in another it seems to support the element of political and cultural diversity (by adding to the cultural heterogeneity of the members as well as by extending the number of political visions of the finalité of Europe).

The theoretical argument of the paper holds that the tendency towards diversity and contingency in the European project is not reflected and difficult to deal with in some of the major theories on European integration. One such reading, Europe as a superstate, perceives the European order in analogy with the nation-state and therefore as in need of a set of homogenous common values. A second - increasingly popular - reading, Europe as a polity, takes various guises but its common denominator is that Europe operates as a form of governance (on multiple levels) rather than as a state. In this reading of Europe, it is either expected that a common European identity will be a by-product of governance, or, that such an identity is derived from the national level. The third reading, most prominently reflected in Habermas’ idea of a European polity founded on constitutional patriotism, assumes the emergence of a ‘thin’, procedural allegiance of citizens to the European project. In this, it confines the cultural to the pre-political sphere, i.e., as not being of import on the political level.

The theoretical argument is flanked by a substantive argumentation which analyses the actual transformation of the European project. First, the enlargement project is understood as the assimilation of Eastern European or not-yet-fully European countries. In this, the enlargement strategy of the European Union towards the former communist countries can be understood as an attempt to retain the foundational values of a singularly defined European project in the face of the incorporation of states with a radically different, and potentially undermining, background. Second, with the help of Alexander’s concepts of assimilation and multi-culturalism, I argue that the situation has changed in two ways. With the accession of the newcomers they gained in recognition on the European level. Further, with the constitutionalisation process Europe has become more open to diversity and wider participation. Both imply that the new member states will be able to act on their diversity in the post-enlargement European order. Third, a closer look of the constitutionalisation process and the “Convention method” reveals that the often cited potential for deliberation and participation was compromised, both in empirical terms (inequal status of the participants, limited participation, the relapse into a less deliberative mode, the focus on national diversity, and the limitation of the substance of deliberation), and theoretical terms (an emphasis on ‘formal’ deliberation).

I conclude that the post-enlargement situation can indeed be more adequately described as one of diversity and openness rather than homogeneity and increasing unity. Post-enlargement Europe is less characterized by the idea of Fortress Europe, but more by a tendency towards the inclusion of diversity, to openness and participation. Nevertheless, the incorporation of diversity leaves still much to be desired, not in the least because of the ‘procedural’ interpretation of the deliberative mode. In order to effectively take difference into account, deliberation should include the recognition of difference and an emphasis on mutual understanding, rather than being focused on consensus-building.

Key words
■ European integration ■ Enlargement ■ Constitutionalisation ■ diversity ■ multi-culturalism