

# A United States of Europe?

by Cesáreo Rodríguez-Aguilera de Prat, Brussels, Peter Lang, 2020, ISBN: 9782807614352, €42 (paperback).

The core question addressed by this book is “why is the United States of Europe practically impossible today if in theory and principle the concept is most rational?” As pointed out by the author, who is a Professor of Political Science at the University of Barcelona, the EU would automatically become the first or second world power depending on the sectors (e.g. GDP, trade, R&D&i, education, health, or defence, to name just a few).

The main area of analysis is related to political actors. Other than these, Rodríguez-Aguilera de Prat identifies the media and public opinion as having a fair share of responsibility for the low feeling of pan-European belonging among the continent’s citizens. According to his view, the former continue to wrongly label European news within the ‘international’ or ‘foreign affairs’ sections, although it is untenable nowadays to consider Continental politics in such a way. They can simply be issues of a home or national nature within the context of the EU.

As regards citizens inputs, and beyond the recurrent debate on whether it would be possible to envision a European *demos*, it is awkward to regard European nationals as foreign subjects when they move around the EU. However, to combat such a perception, and despite the transitory effects of the COVID19 (to be confirmed with the return to the ‘old normality’), the use of just an ID together with the European Health Card, have greatly helped to forge an increasing sense of EU belonging by the citizens.

The first chapter of the book deals with the background of the process of Europeanization. As the causal narrative is not the specific purpose of the author, his attention encapsulates the main integrationist projects put forward politically. A special focus is addressed to the Constitutional Treaty of the European Union, which is considered altogether as the most serious attempt to provide the EU with a federalizing structure, although it was attenuated with the Lisbon Treaty now in force.

In the second chapter, the EU is examined as a hybrid entity constructed with some federal ‘materials’ and others of a diverse nature. Euroscepticism (in both populist and national-sovereignist versions) is well dissected. Given the importance of Germany within the EU, its role is subsequently analysed as a country clearly in favour of a European federalization. The chapter closes describing and examining proposals for a further integration in the economic, financial, fiscal, and international and defence areas. It takes into account a broader perspective beyond a merely institutional approach.

The third chapter reviews the 2019 European elections, which mainly concentrated in the question about the degree and intensity of European integration. Besides the cases of Hungary, Poland and Italy, an ample section is devoted to Brexit and the eventual divorce between the EU and the UK.

The fourth chapter concentrates in the analysis of the electoral manifestos of the majority of parties that achieved representation in the European Parliament in the six most populated member states (Germany, France, United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, and Poland). The author ponders the electoral programmes of twenty eight contesting formations with the aim of assessing six questions regarding the debate of the systemic nature of the EU: supranationality of the EU; reform of the treaties and a new Constitution; institutional changes; the problems of the Euro; the scope and powers of the European Central Bank; and security and defence with

the articulation of a European army. Before the 2019 elections, the author posed such six questions to the eight Eurogroups with representation at the European parliament. Responses were reluctant and incomplete in some cases, but Rodríguez-Aguilera has disposed of a valuable research material on which a final appendix is incorporated at the end of the book.

The fifth chapter deals with the new Commission presided over by Ursula Von der Leyen since 2019 and the outcome of Brexit. Confronted with the serious pandemic of COVID19, the author underlines that the first response in Europe was a retreat to nation-state arenas. However, it is now clear that the crisis brought about by the pandemic has induced a mutualised solution.

The concluding remarks underline the assumption that there is nothing in the short-term future which could uphold the idea that the EU progresses ineluctably towards a genuine federal polity. The establishment of the United States of Europe ought not to be conceived necessarily as the end result of the ongoing process of convergence in the Old Continent. Institutional integration in Europe could not be based on acculturation and a new identity formation along the lines of USA's melting pot. European norms and legislation can only legitimise taking on board both history and cultural diversity which is intrinsically inherent to the mosaic of peoples and communities composing Europe. According to such perspective, multilevel governance is an available and appropriate resource in the process of legitimation and optimization of the internal (re) distribution of powers according to the two guiding principles of Europeanisation: territorial subsidiarity and democratic accountability.

In a future research endeavour, Rodríguez-Aguilera could well focus his attention on the role that the European Social Model plays on the advancing of Europeanisation and its institutional consequences. Europe keeps its firm legitimizing support to the welfare state as the provider of social rights entitlements and well-being during the XX century. On its preservation rests much of the future viability of the European institutional framework . After all, the welfare state in its various outlooks and regimes is a genuine European invention and characterises itself from other models in the global (dis) order (e.g. Emergent neo-slavery or Anglo re-commodification). Much of the survival of the European welfare depends upon on the continuing tuning of the main ideological European sensibilities (Christian-democrat, Social-democrat, Liberal).

Reading this book by Prof. Carlos Rodríguez-Aguilera de Prat is highly useful to handle interpretative clues and to increase the knowledge in the federalizing approach needed to favour a deeper integration of a plural and unitary Europe.

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