The future of European regional integration. Dilemmas of governance and redistribution

Péter Balázs

The cornerstone of the global system, as well as the EU, is the principle of the sovereign equality of states. However, states are far from being equal. This paradox is one of the main obstacles to the smooth functioning of international organisations, including the EU. Sovereigntist critics of the EU pretend that national competencies are sacrificed in exchange for co-operation and joint governance at a larger scale. In reality, EU membership has widened the scope of member states' sovereignty: they are better informed and can take part in decision-making at the European level. However, the EU's decision-making power has weakened for two main reasons. First, EU competencies have been watered down: exclusive union competencies exist only in five sectors, in parallel with a large and growing number of mixed and shared competencies. As a result, EU decision-making tends towards intergovernmental methods, and consensus seeking opens the way for veto players. Second, after the end of the Cold War, in the 1990s, many new states were formed because of the dissolution of former federal structures. In place of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia 24 new states have taken form so far, 19 out of them Europeans, and the majority is attracted by the EU. The EU member states from the former eastern bloc which have Soviet-type political, economic, and social heritage, have 'imported' their unsolved – internal and external – conflicts into the EU. After the European elections in 2024 and the renewal of the European Parliament and the European Commission, those institution should undergo a 'slimming diet' and speed up decision-making by extending qualified majority voting. This is an absolute precondition of further enlargements.

Has the Europeaun Union remained an unfulfilled promise?

László Csaba

After two decades of EU membership, a majority of the Hungarian public still supports membership. However, reflecting intense governmental influencing in terms of communication and policies alike, the previously negligible euroskepticism has benn gaining substantial ground. Following a different path from what 'Brussels' aims at, has become part and parcel of good manners nowadays. The round anniversary of Hungary's EU accession allows for a strategic rethinking of pluses and minuses of

the road taken. Finally, I contemplate where the line of regular confrontation with the Union may lead us.

Deep-integration Paradigm

Péter Halmai

Trade theory considers new generation regional agreements that go beyond traditional regional constructions (focused on conventional border measures)as "deep" (trade) integration, which includes regulatory convergence (and possibly additional "deep" elements). Depth is a crucial dimension also in the context of European integration. On the one hand, it expresses the level (state) reached by the most advanced regional integration. On the other hand, it indicates the direction of the process: deepening, increasingly tighter integration as a developmental trend. Conceptualising deep (regional) integration (deep-integration) as a system, as a conceptual framework, may offer a way to rethink integration theory. The interpretative framework of deep-integration consists of two main dimensions: depth (regulatory, institutional) and homogeneity (real economic, financial). Based on combinations of these, different integration levels, stages of development, and configurations can be analysed within structured frameworks. Core integration, the scope of the most advanced integration achievements at any given time, is defining. By incorporating differentiated integration and disintegration, a new analytical framework, the paradigm of deep-integration, can be outlined.

Memories from the first years of Hungary's membership in the European Union

Gábor Iván

In the period between Hungary's accession to the European Union in May 2004 and the first Hungarian presidency of the EU in 2011, Hungary became a member state with all the experiences necessary to enjoy the benefits of EU membership. During these seven years, Hungary became part of the renewal of the EU Treaties, adopted a strategy about its EU policy, went through the baptism of fire of the debate on multiannual financial frameworks, became part of the Schengen area, successfully fulfilled its tasks during the presidency, and played a pivotal role in concluding Croatia's EU accession negotiations. The commitment, the belief in the common interests of the Union and Hungary, which was the driving force of the Hungarian accession negotiations, persisted. The author recalls the events which were of decisive importance in the first seven years of Hungary's EU membership. The recollection is based on the memories of his personal contribution.