

Sarah Wolff
The London School of Economics and Political Science

Zielonka, J. (2006). *Europe as Empire: the nature of the enlarged European Union*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 293p.

Abstract

Eager to provide an alternative explanation to the process of European Integration, Jan Zielonka revives the concept of empire by making the argument that the EU is a neo-medieval empire in the making. A book that is very much welcomed in times of doubts and reflections on the future of the European project.

In the aftermath of the French and Dutch referendums, many are those who cast some doubts on the future of the European Union (EU) both politically and geographically. At the time of this review, politicians have been thinking about several ways to revive the constitutional text, through a ‘mini-treaty’ or some ‘flexible integration’. 2006 being described as a period of pause, it is hoped in academic and political circles that 2007 will bring about some clear orientation for the European project, probably at the occasion of the anniversary of the Treaties of Rome. It is in this context that *Europe as Empire* offers an original contribution to explain the ongoing changes which have occurred since the 2004 enlargement. Mixing adequately theoretical and empirical investigation, *Europe as Empire* endows the ambition to propel an innovative way of thinking about the EU and European integration; an optimistic book that will be welcomed by any person who has some faith in the European project.

Relying on two theoretical models, the Westphalian model and the neo-medieval model, Jan Zielonka argues that it is towards the latter that the EU is increasingly turning to. It must be stressed though that the concept of neo-medievalism is not a novelty and has experienced a regain of interest in the last decade. Originally, Hedley Bull resorted to this idea in the seventies, when describing a post-Westphalian order in which loyalties were multiple and where “no ruler or state was sovereign in the sense of being supreme over a given territory” (Bull, 1977). Close to the post-modernist and governance approaches, academics reused it to apprehend the new reality of the post-cold war period (Minc 1993; Kaplan 1994; Cerny 1998; Kobrin 1999; Rengger 2000; Friedrichs 2001). A reality in which citizens enjoy multiple loyalties, at local, regional, national and supranational levels, where

the state borders are fuzzier due to transnational activities, where jurisdictions overlap, and in which heterogeneity and divided sovereignty predominate. However, none of these attempts have been able to offer a systematic analysis; an objective aimed at by the Czech scholar who provides us with evidence from the latest enlargement of the EU, but also from the fields of economics, democracy and foreign affairs.

Before plugging in the analysis of the book itself, two preliminary criticisms need to be made. First, one would contradict the author when he argues that the current European integration theories are biased by a state-centric vision and downplay the impact of the 2004 enlargement. This is indeed going very hastily over the extensive literature produced in the recent years which has made huge efforts to overcome the inherent flaws of the discipline of International Relations. The governance literature is in particular, a very valid attempt to overcome this state-centric bias and has revealed successful in apprehending the fuzzier and complex realities of regional integration in Europe (see Kohler-Koch and Rittberger 2006 for a good overview). Perhaps this distorted vision of the literature is the result of the approach of the author itself, which is in reality very close to the governance approach. Second, on a methodological level, by conceiving the EU as a Middle Age empire, unlike the nineteenth century versions of the French and British colonial empires, the author made the choice to adopt an ideal-type methodology in constructing his paradigm. Although this method is a very useful heuristic device, it is the opinion of this reviewer that the author is running the risk of oversimplifying historical reality. Any historians would indeed point to the difficulty to compare the Empire of Charlemagne to the Ottoman Empire.

Turning to the structure of the book, the author devotes the first three chapters to the 2004 enlargement, which has supposedly reinforced the neo-medieval character of the European empire. The enlargement to Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) constitutes the 'prototype of imperial politics' (p.13) through which the EU has led an 'aggressive export' of its norms and values. A behaviour that lead the author to maintain that the EU is not a typical empire which usually disregards values, and relies only on military power. In a way, the EU is close to what used to be the 'just' war of the medieval times, which attributed ethic and morality to the aggression of a neighbour. In fact, the recent European Neighbourhood Policy which aims at securing a 'ring of friends', abound in references to European values in its policy documents. But to what extent is this expansion of European values 'aggressive' is yet to be demonstrated; as it is often more due to the

preservation of power asymmetries and interdependences that the EU is able to export norms. Usually, on the contrary, due to the famous ‘capability-expectation gap’, the EU is not always able to play a very efficient ‘carrot and stick’ game, a point that the human rights’ situation in the Mediterranean neighbourhood would confirm without much difficulties and thus downplay the argument of the author.

The three following chapters broach three aspects of the plurilateral governance that is at the heart of the European empire. In the field of economic governance, borders are becoming fuzzier and economics is now characterised by flexibility, devolution and delegation. The keywords are facilitation and coordination, as exemplified by the Open method of coordination (OMC). The same goes for EU democratic governance which relies on non-majoritarian institutions that are the executive agencies which evaluate, inform but also implement EU law. Zielonka argues not mistakenly that the public sphere is weak, fragmented and with a lack of *demos* (p. 138). The author encourages scholars and politicians to innovate and find new ways of thinking democracy, beyond the Westphalian paradigm. Ways in which solidarity among citizens would be secured, and in which society would be based on three pillars: pluralism, individualism and multiculturalism.

Then, moving to EU’s external relations, the Oxford’s academic insists on the neo-medieval character that defines the EU’s relationship with its periphery. Like for economics and democratic governance, actors and loyalties of its foreign policy are multiple. Referring to the values that define EU’s foreign policy, Zielonka would certainly agree with those who defend the vision of a normative power Europe, which influences its neighbourhood through conditionality, rather than through military power. A conditionality that is exemplified by the prospect of membership during the 2004 enlargement, or by the prospect of taking part into European programmes for the Wider Europe. At a time of the heavily debated question of Turkey accession, *Europe as Empire* defends the thesis that enlargement will continue. Maintaining that the last enlargement has challenged the view that membership could only be offered to rich and politically stable countries, geopolitical considerations will drive further offers of membership. Because of the neo-medieval character of the European empire, it is conceivable, for the author, that North African countries such as Lebanon or Israel, could accede to membership. A view that is very much at odds with the current situation and omits the public opinion variable.

The medieval analogy offered by the author should trigger concerns on chaos and anarchy to any reader but also on democracy, which historically is in dissonance with medievalism. Notwithstanding the inherent problems that such a system entails, Zielonka sees two answers to these issues. First, the EU must improve its 'plurilateral' system of governance which encourages flexibility and differentiation. It should not only be efficient but also legitimate. For that purpose, relying on the work of Robert A. Dahl, Zielonka suggests that the EU should concentrate on education, public health, town and city planning in order to prevent the 'feeling of apathy, alienation, banalization and introversion' too often generated by the European project. To circumscribe the lack of democracy usually associated with the notion of medievalism, participation of citizens should be reinforced at the local and nation-state level (p. 187). In addition, access to organised groups of citizens as well as civic and political rights of citizens must be reinforced. Only then, by offering alternative channels of contestation, some legitimacy will emerge.

Concluding on an optimistic note, Zielonka argues that the road towards medievalism 'represent a recipe for chaos and conflict', and will allow the EU, relying on its pluralism and diversity to be better armed to cope with the challenges of globalisation. *Europe as Empire* is an interesting contribution to the current debates on the EU and the enlargement process, providing an attractive alternative and optimistic answer. In order to create a paradigmatic change in European integration studies, it is nonetheless fundamental to define a research agenda and a methodology, two necessary elements of a good recipe to operate this 'scientific revolution' dear to Thomas Kuhn.

References

- Cerny, P. G. (1998). "Neomedievalism, Civil Wars and the New Security Dilemma." Civil Wars 1(1): 36-64.
- Friedrichs, J. (2001). "The Meaning of New Medievalism." European Journal of International Relations 7(4): 475-502.
- Kaplan, R. (1994). "The Coming Anarchy." The Atlantic Monthly 273(2): 44-76.
- Kobrin, S. (1999). Neomedievalism and the Postmodern Digital World. Globalization and Governance. A. Prakash and J. A. Hart. New York, Routledge: 165-87.

Kohler-Koch, B. and B. Rittberger (2006). "The 'Governance Turn' in EU Studies." Journal of Common Market Studies **44**(Annual Review): 27-49.

Minc, A. (1993). Le nouveau Moyen Age. Paris, Gallimard.

Rengger, N. J. (2000). European Communities in a Neo-Medieval Global Polity: The Dilemmas of Fairyland? International Relations Theory and the Politics of European Integration: Power, Security and Community. M. Kelstrup and M. C. Williams. London, Routledge: 55-71.