

Editorial

Europe of the Center and the Peripheries

Associated with a perception of development and underdevelopment of countries in the global market, the concepts of center and periphery in the European Union (EU) remain both present and abstract. By evoking the “center-periphery” model, Member States such as Germany, France or Italy would be part of the “center”, while others – particularly those in Southern and Eastern Europe – would be included in the “periphery”, being subject to the decisions taken by the center.

This view, embedded in the realist doctrine of International Relations, as opposed to a model of Europe based on solidarity and cooperation between states and peoples, is important for a general understanding of the European Union, and in particular of regional development. Indeed, at the heart of the EU itself is the objective of promoting the economic integration of its Member States, as well as the aim of economic convergence between states and regions.

The consecutive rounds of enlargements, which have widened the disparity in development between the Member States and, more recently, the sovereign debt crisis, have renewed the “center-periphery” paradigm. Although the concept and debate about a “two-speed Europe” isn’t new, nor peaceful, among Member States, in reality there are a number of different “Europes” (Schengen, Euro) coexisting in the EU, and a central directory of states, which takes the major decisions on deepening European integration.

The “Europe of the Center and the Peripheries” thematic issue gathers a selected number of accepted papers for the VIII Europe in the World Annual Meeting (Lisboa, 16-17 April 2020), which had the financial support of the Portuguese Science and Technology Foundation’s Scientific Community Support Fund (FCT-FACC). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, for the first time, the meeting did not take place, but nevertheless this thematic issue is a tangible result of it.

The issue has five articles ranging from the discussion on the future of Europe, enlargement and security, the quality of governance, and Europeanization, to housing policies in EU Member States.

The European Union is a forum of permanent discussion about its own future. Taking stock of that, Isabel Baltazar’s article focus on the discussion on

how to conciliate the union with a two or several speed Europe. Having the 2017 Rome Declaration as a starting point, she examines how the EU has been able to conciliate its unity around fundamental values with policy adjustments, and argues that throughout the history of the European integration process it has been possible to reconcile solidarity with responsibility.

A set of two articles centers on the Eastern Partnership (EaP), a dimension of the European Neighborhood Policy, between the EU and the partner countries, aiming at strengthening and deepening the political and economic relations between the EU and the six partner countries, while also supporting sustainable reform processes in those countries.

Valeria Caras's article focuses on the relationship between the EU and the EaP countries, going beyond the center-periphery and external governance models and using the theory of linkage and leverage to analyze the interactions between both parties and also Russia, an important player in the region. She concludes that not all EaP countries have the same linkage with the EU: whereas Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia have stronger links with the EU, Belarus and Armenia are closer to Russia, and Azerbaijan is in between.

Ana Paula Tostes and Yasmin Renni choose one of the EaP countries, Moldova, to analyse its Europeanization's dynamic. They look at the regulations, laws and amendments to law implemented by the Moldovan Government as assessed in the Association Implementation Reports, and come to the conclusion that, in a top-down perspective regarding economic cooperation and trade, Europeanization in Moldova occurs without significant trouble, but that regarding corruption EU's influence is more limited.

Geopolitics, security and bordering issues matter to the European Union. In conjunction with the Eastern Partnership, the EU has also a strategy for the Western Balkans which includes, in the medium to long term, another enlargement round. Marco Cruz's article assesses the connection between EU enlargement and the establishment of security communities, as well as the geostrategic and geopolitical importance of the Western Balkans, and the way the EU has had an impact in those countries namely through the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. He, then, argues that the EU's indecision towards the enlargement to the Western Balkans' countries contributes to other foreign players to take action in the region.

Finally, on a completely different subject, Gonalo Antunes and Caterina Di Giovanni address the housing policies in Portugal and Italy, two EU Member States, but one from the periphery and the other from the center. By examining the theoretical discourse on housing and the housing policies in both countries, they determine that, in fact and despite their different paths on this subject, it's not possible to draw a clear division and that a "between peripheries" scenario is applied to this case-study.

All together, these five articles contribute to the dissemination and discussion of important topics that are part of the European Union and/or Member States current debate, although in different degrees, and *Debater a Europa* journal also fulfils its aim and provides a forum for such an academic outreach.

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