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The cultural future of Europe. Democracies at times of global changes.

Introduction / The convergence theory as a socio-scientific approach

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Introduction. The future of Europe is often seen as a linear continuation of an on-going development, fueling as such hopes for better times - provided that political and economic decisions keep things on the “right” track. This perspective has been complemented by two assumptions in this book: firstly, that the outcome of such decisions depends on how the past is regarded and rated, and secondly, that the decisions themselves are necessarily influenced by non-European factors. The present investigation of the relationship between culture and politics is thus centered on three points of interest: one is historical, another Europe-focused and a third deals with foreign policy. This procedure is based on a further premise, i.e. that changes in society do not occur either automatically or necessarily. They usually take place as a result of the actions of those representing specific interests and values, who are at the same time exposed to various influencing factors. This does not mean, conversely, that all these social processes can be regulated by applying scientifically sound analysis. On the contrary, scientific methods and theories themselves are subject to constant change, making their application and advance in knowledge an on-going challenge.

The dynamics of the development of the states within Europe over the past 150 years is described in the chapter dealing with the historical aspects: from absolute to constitutional monarchies, from republics and dictatorships to the present-day democracies. Whatever the case, culture has always served the purpose of power politics, thus hovering at the crossroads of war and peace. This became very apparent at the beginning of the 20th century when the freshly founded democratic states allowed their citizens to determine for the first time their own cultural agenda. Indeed, the victory of the politically based consociational democracies who pledged to uphold cultural pluralism in the peace treaties of 1919/1920 was soon to be challenged by anti-democratic, nationalistic and national socialist movements. It was ultimately National Socialism with its racially motivated new order of Europe that, to this very day, has shaped our understanding of the nation as a culturally homogeneous community. The sit-

uation was particularly tenacious in Eastern Europe which came under Stalin's sphere of influence and did not return to the democratic model of a nation of free political consensus. On the contrary, a cultural and national model was adopted and further developed, granting political participatory rights according to cultural affinity.

The second part of this book describes how after the Second World War an attempt was made at a new start for democracy in Western Europe, whereby efforts initially made towards European integration between the two world wars were renewed. But it was not only factors like the political division of the Continent into East and West, or a planned or free market economy that stood in the way. The borderline between dictatorships and democracies ran straight through Western Europe, between the members of the Council of Europe and the regimes in Portugal, Spain and Greece whose elites justified their claim to power on the basis of Christian and cultural values. There was also an initial resentment on the part

of the colonial powers Great Britain and France who only gradually abandoned the cultural models of their one-time imperial greatness. The euphoria was all the greater when, with the end of the confrontation of the systems in 1990, the Eastern Europe countries willing to reform seized the opportunity for democratic self-determination. However, cultural models of the socialist era continued to have their influence or revived those used under National Socialism so that the threat of a renewed politicization of culture in Europe has been increasing ever since. This tendency is reflected in the popularity of nationalist parties in the elections to the European Parliament as well as in the independence referendums (2014) of Crimea, Catalonia or Scotland. Cultural values can sow the seeds of discord again and even throw the territorial integrity of a seasoned, consociationally organised country like Great Britain into disarray.

In the third part of this book we take a look at the extent to which the phenomenon of culturalization has already affected the foreign policies of some of the EU member states. Away from the eye of the European public, countries like Bulgaria, Rumania or Hungary are following a policy of dual nationality in order to compensate for their dwindling workforce. In so doing, they are not only turning millions outside of the EU into citizens of the EU without the other EU members having a say or right to object. They are, above all, destabilizing all the countries bordering the EU with a model of a cultural nation based on lineage and language, from the Baltic states of Belarus and Ukraine to the Republic of Moldavia and the Balkans. Whereas Russia was initially only a defensive player in the wings of these inter-ethnic lines of conflict, it has itself become part of the conflict since the Georgian War in 2008, or at least since the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis at the end of 2013. But there are other examples such as Turkey or the countries of the Arab Spring that show to what extent even the seasoned members of the EU are progressively moving away from their own values as consociational democracies and pressing for a culturization of the Muslim-oriented world. By doing so, however, they are promoting a gradual disintegration of the state along the lines of cultural and religious identities instead of supporting the politically motivated consociational democracies.

In the end, it is a question of what these developments mean and what alternatives there are. Do they reflect a temporary crisis of values among western democracies or do they indicate a cultural convergence with countries in which the ruling elites legitimize themselves with cultural or religious values, as was the case with the European monarchies and dictatorships? The intention of this book is to sensitize the reader to the

fact that such a process of convergence could ultimately be beneficial to democracy and the rule of law if Europe's consociational democracies remember their constitutional values, maintain them as their cultural assets and organize their European integration process as well as their foreign policies accordingly. This ultimately necessitates commitment to non-intervention and acknowledgement of the territorial integrity of the countries concerned. [...]

4.6. The convergence theory as a socio-scientific approach

The purpose of this last sub-chapter is to draw on scientific research again to show how useful various theoretical approaches can be. They help to examine fundamental assumptions that determine how the world is perceived and, in this case, how the future of Europe is discussed. The latter affect expectations just as much as the capacity to look for solutions to problems in a creative way. In to-day's crisis of European integration looking ahead is the only way not to be inhibited by pessimistic forecasts. However, optimism alone is not enough and would not satisfy scientific analysis either. Since research on Europe to date has evidently reached an impasse and is in danger of being reduced to ideological discourse, it is time to try a change of perspective. The following is an attempt to take a renewed look at the forgotten approach of the convergence theory and thus give fresh impetus to the discourse on European integration.

4.6.1. The forgotten convergence theory in the light of the East-West conflict

The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 came as a complete surprise to the general public and almost automatically triggered a change of political system in Eastern Europe. This event also became the focus of attention for scientific research which sought to define a suitable path towards democracy and a market economy. Hardly any researcher doubted that the Western system had asserted itself in the global competition between East and West. On the contrary, researchers based their criteria for evaluating and assessing the change of system on this very assumption.

For the sake of this, they even abandoned their system-oriented theoretical approach, without investigating in the interests of scientific research why it was not possible to predict the sudden collapse of socialism and why the change of system itself could not be explained anymore. Instead, the Transformation Theory appeared as if from

nowhere, a long-forgotten approach dating back to the first half of the 20th century. To render it practicable for research projects carried out at the time, however, it was taken out of its original context and alienated from its research design. For Nikolai I. Bucharin, the Russian who developed the theory, the issue was ultimately a completely different one: he saw it as the “transition from Capitalism to Communism”¹⁹². And again, in his book “The Great Transformation”, Karl Polanyi, the Hungarian-Austrian economist, took a much more complex approach relating to the interdependency of politics, economics and culture, especially in democratic societies.¹⁹³

Due to the widespread assumption that a whole social and economic system had collapsed as a result of competition between rival systems, other theoretical ideas explaining the upheavals since 1990 were not taken into consideration. And yet, an interesting approach, the so-called convergence theory, had already had a significant impact back in the 1960s and would have made a renewed assessment worth looking into. The theory in question is based on the assumption that, in the course of their economic and technical expansion and social development, both rival systems converge to the extent that their political systems also begin to accommodate each other structurally.¹⁹⁴ Both terms, “system” and “convergence”, were borrowed from terminology relating to the natural sciences and mathematics, but now served the purposes of the cultural and social sciences.

There had already been a first attempt in 1944 by Pitirim A. Sorokin, the Russian-American sociologist, that is, at a time when the USA and Soviet Union were allies in the Second World War and did not as yet regard each other as enemies representing ideological systems but simply as rivals of those systems.¹⁹⁵ Although Sorokin’s comparison was broadly based and took economic, political and social aspects of both countries into account, little notice was taken of it at the time. It wasn’t until the early 1960s that the economist Walt W. Rostow, not least as a result of his career as security advisor to President Lyndon B. Johnson, achieved a breakthrough with the convergence theory. In consequence, the discussion of the pros and cons of the convergence theory was initially confined to the domain of economics.

Rostow was of the opinion that every society, irrespective of its particular political system, goes through various phases of economic development on its way to ultimately becoming an industrial society. He maintained that the Soviet Union was also on this path and, according to his calcu-

lations, would achieve the prevailing level of American industrial production with its mass consumption by 1995.¹⁹⁶ US-American John K. Galbraith and Dutchman Jan Tinbergen, both later awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics, took up the idea and added new structural elements to this model of development which, according to them, made it possible to see how the two different systems influence each other. They claimed that convergence is evident in market economies where major companies in particular become increasingly dependent on planning and controlling structures, and their management begins to take on features similar to centrally planned economies. In planned economies of the Soviet kind, on the other hand, a tendency can be observed for functionaries in large state-run companies to elude political control by transferring “planning decisions from the state to the company”¹⁹⁷ in order to achieve better efficiency. Hence the emergence of a “technostructure” on both sides that is becoming increasingly influential and powerful.

The convergence theory was widely rejected in Eastern Europe. Its claim that the two rival systems gradually converge contradicted the core premise of Marxism-Leninism according to which the demise of Capitalism and the victory of Communism as its visionary counterpart are, historically seen, inevitable. For this reason, the theory came under close scrutiny with the aim of casting doubt on its scientific validity and dismissing it as an “unsound social theory” and its methodology as an example of “pseudo-materialism” and “subjective idealism”.¹⁹⁸ On the one hand, the theory was considered to be a futile attempt to reform the capitalist system using social democratic or social-liberal concepts and to stop it on its path to socialism. On the other hand, the convergence theory was seen to be a dangerous ideological instrument, undermining and politically dividing socialist societies. In the eyes of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) Brandt’s Ostpolitik, for example, under Egon Bahr’s slogan “change through rapprochement” (1963), was just such an attempt.¹⁹⁹ Galbraith’s prediction, however, was felt to be particularly provocative, i.e. his claim that the gradual emergence of a new, technocratic elite leadership would lead to a “de-ideologisation” of the socialist systems and ultimately challenge the authority of the communist parties.²⁰⁰

As a result of the brusque rejection of the convergence theory by the socialist elites of Eastern Europe it was not least the critics in the West who felt vindicated in their scepticism. Samuel Huntington and Zbigniew Brzezinski, pointed out that

managers in western countries could not be compared with Soviet experts. So it seemed unlikely to them that this could lead to a shift of power from the communist parties in favour of a new technocratic elite and hence to a democratisation of the Eastern Bloc.²⁰¹ As a result, this theoretical approach ultimately lost the necessary attention and support in the West that would have facilitated a more in-depth investigation into it, based on further research projects. In retrospect, this is regrettable because, in actual fact, there were a number of reform movements around at the close of the 1960s, sparking not only political protests like the “Prague Spring” (1968). They were supported by new economic ideas proposing a “Third Way” between Capitalism and Socialism, ideas that could have been considered and examined as a possible form of convergence. Drawing on lessons learned from the system of workers’ participation in management in Yugoslavia, Ota Šik, the Czechoslovakian economist, had already developed a “New Economic Model” which Alexander Dubček, the communist reformer, even adopted in his programme for government in 1968.²⁰² However, visions of this kind alarmed the ruling party elites of Eastern Europe and caused them to turn to ruthless repressive measures.

Ultimately, the proponents of free market economies and democratic systems were probably just as surprised by the ability of the convergence theory to predict events, fundamental changes having been forecast for these as well. The authors of this theory gave no indication at all as to what specific consequences the assumed convergence of both systems might have. It was this very openness to future change that inspired not only Ota Šik but also Western researchers who saw the opportunity of further democratising their societies. Undeterred by prevailing ideological constraints, they raised the question of how to regulate and control the process of convergence in such a way that the flaws in both systems could be overcome. Indeed, the problem of today’s democracies was already identified and discussed in the 1970s, that is, that intermediary groups like organizations and parties are increasingly abusing the pluralistic character of our societies for their own individual interests. To avoid the concentration of power within and without the political institutions it would be necessary to strengthen the decentralised self-regulation of subsystems in society. In this way, the hierarchical structures on higher levels of centralised state control could be monitored more effectively so that bad decisions could be detected and corrected in time. Models of democracy as a learning and problem-solving

system were already discussed decades ago by Karl W. Deutsch and Dieter Senghaas under the heading of “social cybernetics”:²⁰³

4.6.2. Cultural Convergences: a short summary of this book

The convergence theory thus appears to have a much greater scope as a source of explanation than when it was applied to the rival systems during the Cold War. Its originator, Russian-American sociologist Pitirim Sorokin, researched not only into the structural similarities between the Soviet and US-American economies and societies already beginning to emerge before the Second World War. As from the early 1950s he focused his attention on basic issues relating to the cultural history of mankind. In his analyses he drew on the eight internationally most well-known philosophers of history of his time, i.e. the Russians Nikolaj Danilevskij and Nikolaj Berdjaev, the US-Americans F.S.C. Northrop and Alfred L. Koeber, the British historian Arnold J. Toynbee, including the German publicists Oswald Spengler, Walter Schubert and Albert Schweitzer. The choice of these authors was no coincidence, since Sorokin deliberately wanted to contrast various attempts at an explanation and draw conclusions from a comparison. In this way he was able to show that all the named philosophers, despite fundamental differences in their schools of thought, share considerable similarities in their hypotheses and line of argument: for example, depending on their respective denomination, they ascribe great importance to religion as a factor in the continuing development of the history of mankind. Samuel Huntington carried on this tradition, reviving the theory of social cycles in the early 1990s and popularizing it for a modern day audience as a religion-driven “clash of civilisations”.

However, Huntington overlooked Sorokin’s convergence theory that had already taken another convincing explanatory approach half a century before. In contrast to most of the philosophers of history before him, Sorokin does not regard civilisations as closed systems or cycles that appear at some point, compete with one another, are challenged and can ultimately disappear. On the contrary, his theory of convergence assumes that civilisations represent open systems that mutually influence one another and partially interfuse, and as such are subject to a process of constant change. Cultural congeries or conglomerates represent an important factor of change, i.e. they are a melting pot of cultural phenomena that are geographically and historically interconnected, constantly extending their sphere of influ-

ence and even transcending cultural systems that have evolved over a period of time. Sorokin chose to coin the term “congeries” (conglomerates), derived from the Latin “congerere” (to collect, compile). These dynamic, cultural phenomena, transported by individuals or groups across all countries and social classes, can develop a high level of mobility and diffusion. In other words, cultural phenomena spread and travel from their place of origin along any existing line of communication, be it by road, rail; radio, airplane, telephone, television, etc. These lines determine to a large extent why a new fashion originating in Paris reaches New York more quickly than a small village near Paris; why towns are more susceptible to foreign cultural influences than rural areas; why foreign cultures are more widespread in ports, in big cities, etc.²⁰⁴

The convergence approach lends itself to presenting a short review and summary of the main points of this book. Thus the historical section demonstrated how the modern concept of nationhood emerged in the course of the 19th century when the major powers were at the height of their colonial and imperial rule. However, they did not at first draw on the model of the nation state, for example, to reform and modernise their monarchical and partly absolutist power structures. On the contrary, they linked the modern term of nation state with cultural values in order to exert influence on the people of neighbouring countries. They pursued a policy of differentiation according to linguistic and religious communities for the purpose of nation-building by supporting sections of the population that were culturally closely related. France was the first country to secure the rights of a protecting power for the Catholics in the Ottoman Empire, whilst Russia presented itself as advocate of the Orthodox Christians living there. In turn, the Ottoman sultan proclaimed himself protector of the Muslims living outside of his immediate sphere of influence. After all, around a hundred years ago four out of five Muslims lived under the colonial rule of European major powers. Even if, according to many historians, civilisations were irreconcilably opposed one another, the convergence theory presents a different picture. The façade of culture-driven images of the enemy revealed the same principle of wielding power, i.e. targeting the enemy with one’s own religion-driven secular power and extending spheres of influence. According to Sorokin, the congeries or convergent moment consisted of adopting a successful infiltrating strategy to undermine social cohesion.

The success story of this power-driven strategy is documented by the fact that it is the cultural factor, in addition to the religious factor, that defined all the European monarchies. That is, the discovery of speech communities, especially language affinities, opened up the possibility of pushing forward cultural differentiation, in addition to religious affiliation, within the population of the neighbouring country, for example, by founding schools, and standardising new written and official languages. Many disputes today about language standardisation and official languages date back to the 19th century when, for the first time, mother tongue and nationality were equated. However, this model of cultural nation states at the interface between major empires in South-East and Central Europe was soon to cause a backlash against these very powers. In the Hapsburg monarchy the rivalries between the language communities increased after the changeover to the Hapsburg-Hungarian monarchy. The new Slav-speaking cultural nations felt disadvantaged because they were in actual fact in the majority. These unsolved problems paved the way for the outbreak of the First World War which ultimately sealed the demise of this multi-ethnic state.

France and Great Britain were spared an ethnically and culturally oriented differentiation of this kind, although they pursued this strategy themselves in their colonies and although an influx of migrants could have caused a similar development in the metropolises of the colonial powers. Indeed, they defended their empires using different models of civilisation which on the surface appeared as irreconcilable attempts at modernisation, but were in actual fact convergent instruments of power. Yet shortly after outbreak of the First World War exactly one hundred years ago it became clear how disastrous the consequences of the cultural paradigm were. It was not able to keep any of its promises, serving ultimately only to justify a war of extermination between the leading civilisations and cultural nations in Europe. Seen from today’s perspective, it becomes even clearer how little the warring countries in actual fact differed in cultural terms. Convergence is not only apparent in the use of state-of-art military technology. On the battlefields there was direct confrontation with the enemy and a shared experience that at the end of the war led to a rethink and the search for political alternatives.

A genuine step forward in terms of civilisation came when the model of the culture-based nation state with its potential of causing conflict was re-

placed by the concept of a nation state as a political entity: From now on the term nation was defined as a politically oriented nation state that determines its own laws and elects its own governments within a democratic regulatory framework. Today's critics, who regard the nation state as a relic of the past, fail to recognise not only the innovative capacity of this concept originating between the two world wars, but also its continuing significance as a blueprint for maintaining peace in Europe. After signing the Paris Peace Treaties (1919/1920), the new constitutional democracies founded the League of Nations, which as the predecessor of the United Nations, was responsible for preserving peace. In so doing they departed from the imperial models of governance of past monarchies with their vassal and buffer states. Instead, there was recognition for the first time of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and legal equality of all its member states. Decades later, these principles were to keep the Cold War under control and could even diffuse heated conflicts today, providing the states kept to the rules of international law.

In addition, a further convergent cultural phenomenon had already emerged at the beginning of the 20th century, defining today's discourse in European politics, that is, the concept of federation or a confederation of states. A first comprehensive blueprint for European unification was presented by the Pan-European Union in the European Manifest (1924), that is, by its founder, Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi. His ancestors were members of the leading nobility in the Habsburg monarchy, who saw themselves as the losers when this multinational empire disintegrated. Because of this, Coudenhove-Kalergi, one of the first social activists ever, recognised what dangers might emanate from the new nation states if they did not overcome their culturally rooted national founding myths. His plans for Europe, however, were not exclusively based on the new democratic principle; they also left the door open to alliances with authoritarian and totalitarian regimes of his time, for example, with Italy under Mussolini. However, the Pan-European Movement in particular, as the name suggests, had not wholly abandoned the imperial model of government. This is evident from the fact that the new European federation as a middle power was to distance itself from the Soviet Union and Great Britain and hence confine itself to Continental Europe including the African colonies of France. The role model for the "United States of Europe" was explicitly the USA, but also indirectly the Soviet Union.

Even if the federation began its rise to power as a form of cooperation for securing peace, there were substantial conceptual differences in finer points. Neither the Pan-European Union nor the memorandum for the creation of a European federation that Aristide Briand, the French Foreign Minister, put forward in 1930 challenged the principle of sovereignty of the nation states. In this respect these concepts of Europe differed from their role models in one very significant point. The latter constituted one single state, recognised as such under international law. Thus, for example, it is only with the approval of the central government that a US-American federal state can opt out. The Soviet constitution (1923) granted the respective republics at least the formal right to leave, making its eventual dissolution possible (1991). By contrast, with his plan for a federation Briand argued in favour of retaining the sovereign rights of the national governments, and the Pan-European Union even insisted on preserving the cultural identities of the European nation states. In this respect the Pan-European Union resembled the Soviet model, whose federal structure was based on the model of the culturally-based nation state. Thus the creation of a politically defined nation state under democratic conditions was not the aim of the Soviet system.

Yet there were still other European forces that were to use the obsolete model of the culturally defined nation state for anti-democratic purposes, and they were the national-socialist and fascist movements. The confrontation at the end of the Second World War with the crimes committed under the Nazi dictatorship made any analysis of its policy towards Europe fade into the background. Focusing on the latter could easily create the impression of deliberately diverting attention away from Germany's main responsibility. Seen from today, the national socialist reign of terror over Europe can also be interpreted as a form of cultural convergence: In the first place, after occupying its neighbouring European countries, Hitler's Germany had crushed their politically based nation states and set up a new order in their place, which reflected the culturally and racially driven hierarchical order of nations enshrined in Nazi ideology. The centre of Europe was to be reserved for the German master race, whilst the areas towards Eastern Europe and Africa were regarded as "colonial outposts". It was here that a circle of semi-autonomous vassal states and allied nationalist and fascist regimes upheld this new system of rule. For this reason, concepts of Europe today advocating any centralisation that

is not democratically controlled, and thus accepting new legal asymmetries between the member states, must be treated with caution. If a Europe that is legally divided in this way also triggers the process of devolution within the nation states leading to culture-driven separatism, as is currently the case in Great Britain and Spain, then all the democracies in Europe are in dire danger.

It was with good reason that after the World War Two a number of West European countries took up the project of European integration and gave it a new framework of values. With the founding of the European Council in 1949, there was focus once more on the principles of national sovereignty, equality before the law, democracy and the rule of law. This new political cooperation soon developed into a project that found itself competing with the system of alliance within the Soviet Union. For during the Cold War the East European countries were under the direct control of the communist parties, especially the CPSU. Soviet hegemony was not to go into decline until the beginning of the CSCE process in 1975 and finally come to an end under Michael Gorbachev's policy of glasnost and perestroika. And so it was already before the fall of the Berlin Wall that a number of communist countries in Eastern Europe tried for democratic reforms with the aim of soon becoming a member of the Council of Europe. Through membership they hoped to endorse and protect their regained national sovereignty. This scenario thus instigated a cultural convergence between Eastern and Western Europe that would have created and cemented the foundation for a new and lasting peace in Europe, including Russia in the process.

Once the Council of Europe, in the early 1990s, had become the main point of reference for countries prepared to reform and had finally admitted most of them, the declared democratisation process began to falter in many places. The main reason for this was the growing economic pressure resulting from the process of transformation within their economic systems which involved measures to promote liberalisation and privatisation. This pressure was the result of the prospect of becoming members of the European Union (EU), which already seemed within reach by the middle of the 1990s after the signing of the Association Agreements. Yet just as with the political reforms before, it was essentially the old Party officials again who took control of this economic change of system. This is exactly where the analyses of the convergence theorists of the 1960s and 1970s were to verify the theory

in its entirety. Indeed, their projections had correctly foreseen that a managerial caste had become a law unto itself in the planned economies of Eastern Europe, still belonging to the respective communist parties but no longer controlled by state administration. This new "techno-structure" benefited enormously from the prescribed "shock therapy" with its abrupt change of system for which there were as yet no adequate legal framework, and whose risks and massive debts had to be shouldered by the public sector.

The growing national debt of the reform countries of Eastern Europe in the middle of the difficult process of transforming their economies destabilised the very society on which hopes for a democratic turnaround were pinned. The domain of culture, ideologically tainted as it was, was subject to special measures and had to accept drastic cuts in state subsidies. Some countries like Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary discussed closing their Ministries of Culture and limited their activities to looking after their national cultural heritage. All this did not augur well for establishing a new political culture so that there were hardly any chance and too some extent no incentive on the part of the new elite to replace the socialist model of a culturally based nation state with a politically defined nation state. This made the process of democratisation significantly more difficult because, as a result of its commercialisation, culture today has only limited leeway to develop its potential as a new social corrective. A further consequence of this was the perpetuation of conflicts among minorities all over Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe that are waylaid by demands for the introduction of new collective rights instead of calling on the statutory protection of individual rights against discrimination provided by the Council of Europe. Following the Eastern enlargement of 2004, 2007 and 2013 the cultural conflicts, now hardly resolvable, have also taken foothold in the European Union itself.

The hasty accession to the EU of East European countries committed to reform produced a cultural paradigm that can be regarded as a new, cross-system convergence: nation states seeking to enter the bigger economic and monetary markets. The problem here is less the merger of strong economies like that of the member states of the European Community (EC) when the European Monetary System (EMS) was founded in 1979. More debatable seems to be the admittance or close association of weaker countries with their economic links because they are compelled to sacrifice fundamental values like democ-

racy and the rule of law and order or other principles such as free collective bargaining for economic priorities. The fact that it is currently above all the weak, reform-oriented countries of Eastern Europe that seek to join and indeed, according to the EU-treaties, must seek to join the Eurozone, might be seen as an attempt to fend off possible currency speculation. However, the Greek crisis together with recent developments in the Bulgarian banking sector show that, as the weakest links in the periphery of Eurozone, they have become even more susceptible to speculators. Ultimate responsibility for errors of judgment may be attributed to an elite that grew up in the old socialist system with the conviction that economic processes obey “economic rules” and are therefore plannable. It is no coincidence that after 1900 a number of old communist party functionaries and economists became bank managers or ministers of finance, eventually making a career in the bureaucratic echelons of Brussels.

The strategies employed by other reform-oriented East European countries to join the EU today are variously motivated. In addition to well-meant and nice-sounding plans to complete European integration, there is a tough power-struggle for up-front positions and funding. Those here calling for control mechanisms to deal with and solve problems on a European level are, it appears, increasingly not being heard. This is the only way to explain that many of those wanting to join, such as most recently Croatia, no longer had to meet the required Copenhagen criteria. There is an even greater problem concerning the current envisaged membership of the West Balkans, Turkey, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldavia and Georgia because they are all unlikely to be able to clear the high hurdles in the foreseeable future. That is why either the criteria for membership are not worth the paper they are written on or the EU member states and their Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) lack the necessary sensitivity to recognise that all the candidates are faced with a big challenge at the present time, that is, coping with their own nation-building processes.

In contrast to the EU members from the most recent stage of expansion, the new candidates from Eastern Europe have no democratic traditions of their own dating back to the interwar period. That is why the nation-building process, especially that of the post-Soviet membership candidates is proving to be so difficult. The EU has not so far appeared to be of great help in its efforts to preserve its own unity and political stability. The decisive question is the interpretation of the third criterion for entry regarding the protection of

minorities. On this point Brussels accepts collectively agreed regulations instead of recommending to its candidates the individually agreed measures that are operative in its own anti-discrimination directives. This needs all the more explaining because numerous examples of conflicts show that collective rights reflect the model of the traditional, culturally based nation state that served to secure power especially in authoritarian regimes. This has the effect of cementing ethnic and national stereotypes instead of overcoming them and embedding them in a modern model of the politically oriented nation state that guarantees the democratic right to political participation without differentiating between cultural identities or preferences.

By voting to implement the collectively agreed regulations for the protection of minority rights the EU member states are not only at odds with their individual domestic policies. The CFSP also loses its credibility and influence in the long-term by having double standards. On the one hand, the authorities in Brussels sympathize with the cause of the Kurdish-speaking minority in Turkey whereas, on the other hand, they turn a deaf ear to the situation of the Russian-speaking people in the Baltic States and Ukraine. While criticising the Turkish government for its armed intervention against Kurdish separatists, they refrain from criticising the new Ukrainian government for the escalation of violence. Whereas they blame mainly Russia for the increase of separatism in South-Eastern Ukraine, in the case of Kurdish separatism in Turkey, Syria and Iraq, the supporters from Kuwait and Saudi-Arabia are hardly even mentioned by name. The EU would not be caught up in these contradictions if it remained true to its own values, not just in foreign policy, and if it supported politically based nation states in their struggle for stability. Looking at this from the point of view of the convergence theory alone, it becomes quite clear that supporting separatist movements will bode ill on the EU member states.

Further aspects relevant to cultural convergence concern the relationship between the church and the state, in other words, the increasing influence of religion in international politics. Here too, the EU takes two paths. Either it encourages the development of modern, secular societies and universally applicable values like freedom of religion and religious pluralism, or it supports those forces in society that use their religions for political purposes. The relations between the EU and today's Muslim world are proving to be particularly difficult. As explained in the third section of this book, one of the reasons here

is that only just over 100 years ago about 80% of the world's Muslim population lived under British or French colonial rule. All Muslim institutions, whether mosques or educational establishments, were under the direct control of the colonial administrations, even if not completely adjusted to Western standards. The Arab elites adopted this form of rule after gaining political independence and put a stop to democratisation in their societies. This includes republican forms of government that organize their official Islam through Religious Affairs Ministries, or, on the other hand, monarchies whose kings, following the European example, regard themselves as secular rulers appointed by God (the doctrine of divine right).

These facts make it clear that it is not Islam but political power structures that are currently preventing democratisation in the Arab world. This was documented by the Arab revolutions of 2011 which surprised even Islamist opposition groups like the Muslim Brothers. And yet, EU member states still support primarily these religious parties instead of backing secular forces that even Muslim theologians in the meantime support. If the EU then sympathises with religious opposition groups in Syria and Iraq, it lets itself be drawn into controversial, inner-religious issues from which it will not emerge unscathed. There is already now evidence of repercussions for European Muslims. The latter have always been exposed to cross-national conflicts within the Arab world. But these rivalries are increasingly occurring across religious communities, also controlled by political forces abroad. That is why the EU is facing the task of protecting its Muslims and fending off the claims of the countries of origin to speak in their name.

As the last example very clearly shows, the phenomenon of cultural convergence can have a positive and negative influence on European and other societies. It is crucial to be aware of these developments and create strategies that serve our own democratic values. With this in mind, it is possible to develop and utilise the innovative potential of culture as a framework for learning and as a social corrective.²⁰⁵ If, on the other hand, culture is seen to be a tradition-driven, inflexible and museum-like system, it will be hardly conducive to learning processes. It ultimately remains to be seen whether Europeans are still aware of their own values and historical links. Above all, however, democracies are faced with the dilemma that competing forms of government hardly ever admit to any deficit of democracy.²⁰⁶ That is why they are all the more dependent on criticism from their allies. This is also not least a crucial

reason for the European Union to emancipate itself from the USA, learn to voice its own interests and convey them by diplomatic means.

4.6.3. The role of the convergence approach in cultural research

As already indicated by the above examples, the convergence theory is especially suited to the analysis of various situations involving conflict. In the process of looking for the underlying structures of conflict, it leaves open the hypothetical possibility that even phenomena that appear to be irreconcilable share various similarities. If this is combined with other theoretical approaches, some completely unexpected insights come to light (cf. Figure 4.1). It would therefore be worthwhile to look back and appraise the beginnings of the convergence theory. If it turns out that these rival systems have actually produced a comparable "techno-structure" in the shape of managerial elites,²⁰⁷ a number of findings from recent transformation research on reform processes in Eastern Europe would have to be examined and reappraised.²⁰⁸

One question of interest, for example, is in what way the old communist cadre may have taken decisive steps towards reform, years before the fall of the Berlin Wall. It would be necessary to reconsider the role of possible partners from management and administration in western industrial countries, the way they cooperated and promoted their interests.²⁰⁹ What bearing did these contacts have on the development of the different market economies? Did they favour particular companies or circumvent certain market mechanisms? Are today's financial and debt crisis and the former rivalry between the political systems connected? Questions like these relating to the convergence theory could be linked to other theories such as monetarism,²¹⁰ (ordo-) liberalism or approaches connected with economic and democratic theories.²¹¹

In the wake of the Arab Spring the transformation theory has become important again, albeit with modified or even completely new issues relating to the countries that are Muslim-oriented. In this case, the focus is on the political systems whereas economic aspects are less important, an area indeed that calls for research. Instead, it is other players in society that are arousing greater interest, in particular religious movements or parties and the military, both of whom are struggling, sometimes even irreconcilably, for political power. The convergence theory could prove to be useful at this point, since it was the military leaders who already began to re-Islamize their judicial

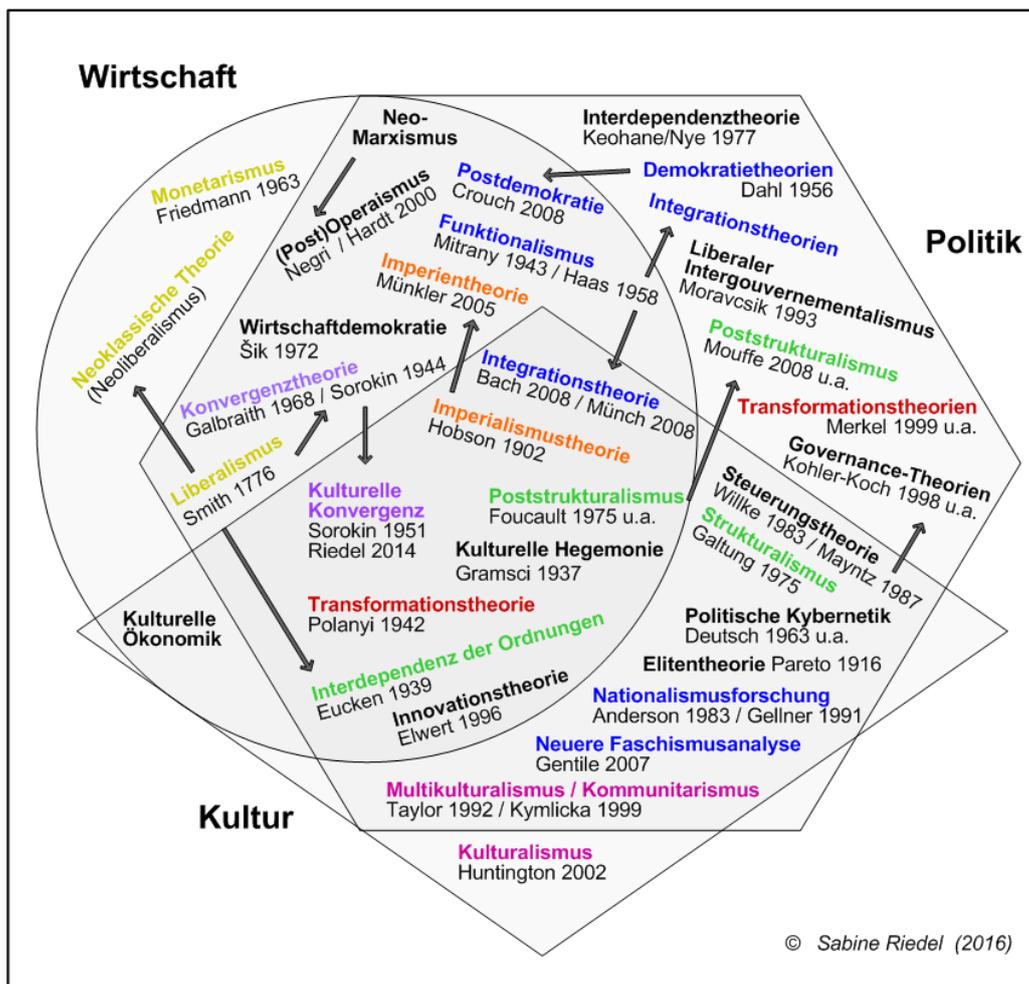
systems during the Cold War period in order to secure their claim - ahead of opposition forces - to leadership in government, economic affairs and society. So it comes as no surprise that the authoritarian governments permitted the founding of religious parties as a reaction to the Arab revolutions (2011), because in this way they were able to have a decisive influence on determining the processes of democratisation. As a result, both rivals agree in the end that their respective forms of state-controlled Islam should also continue to play the dominant role as state religion.²¹²

If it is possible to question the role of religious parties in the Arab-Muslim world, then the same goes for the role of ethnically and culturally oriented parties representing language minorities in Europe. This becomes especially apparent in

countries like Bosnia-Herzegovina or Lebanon which lie at the historical meeting point between the Orient and the Occident. Here identities and differences in religion and language overlap, ultimately reflected in the respective party system. What appears at first sight to reflect pluralism in society, proves to be a problem from the perspective of the theory of democracy. For parties defined by religion as well as those representing language minorities do not really face political competition. On the contrary, they see themselves as advocates of a specific section of the population whom they represent, if necessary without legal authorisation, such as, through elections. Up until now the scientific quality of research on this has suffered from the fact that it has often been minority organisations themselves who have initia-

Figure 4.1:

Meta-theoretical diagram illustrating scientific approaches to the cultural future of Europe



ted it. It is thus worthwhile linking their culture-213 or multi-culture-oriented 214 approach with the convergence theory. There should be a closer examination of the question of to what extent the two rival schools of thought reflect the same 19th century concept of a culturally based nation and whether a perception of culture, limited to religion and language, does justice to the kind of cultural pluralism that does not only apply to groups, but is increasingly defined and actively lived by the individual in modern societies.²¹⁵

4.6.4. Open research questions on the cultural future of Europe

The discourse about different interpretations of the concept of culture will increasingly be the focus of attention in European policy in future years. The referendum on Scotland's independence in the autumn of 2014 heralds the decisive start of this process, to be followed by similar referendums in other EU member countries such as Spain, Rumania or Belgium. Because these demands are solely culture-driven, it is culture that is becoming the cause of political dispute over the pros and cons of national solidarity and sovereignty. At the moment, it is not at all certain how the individual EU member countries will react when, of all places, rich regions like Catalonia or Flanders revoke their solidarity and hand over their commitments to other EU net contributors right in the middle of the Euro crisis. None of the EU institutions seem to be prepared for the question of whether Brussels-launched projects promoting further centralisation of the monetary and financial policies could stall in the process. The new appointments to the EU top posts after the recent European Parliament elections, where the British government was marginalised, are an indication of this. As a result, this has strengthened the position of Eurosceptics in the United Kingdom and also encouraged Scottish separatists because they want to stay in the EU at all costs after independence.

An analysis of the concepts of Europe represented by regionalist parties in the European Parliament is vitally necessary. Indeed, their demands for independence not only challenge the existence of their nation states but equally undermine the political system of the European Union. Based on models of the nation state dating back to the 19th century, they attribute to language communities the status of nations with a right to their own nation state. From this they derive their model of an EU with 50 or more member states instead of 28, thus calling for an increase in size

of the Council of Europe and the European Commission. If this culture-driven subversion of the politically defined nation states with their cultural pluralism succeeds, it would prompt a whole range of research questions. What are the consequences of these regionalist-cum-nationalistic tendencies for the political cohesion of the EU? Why was the Committee of the Regions in the EU, although having an increasing say in matters, not able to mitigate these consequences so far? Are these European regions possibly turning their backs on their nation states in defiance of the increasing centralism in Brussels? Or is it possibly the exact opposite, that there is an alliance emerging between the regional nationalists and proponents of a European unitary state? Above all, what is important is the question of what these different concepts of Europe or, in other words, this leap into the unknown due to the loss of political clout, means for Europe's democracies.

Future research on Europe should therefore no longer limit itself to the history of the European Union alone, but should go back to its actual beginnings about a hundred years ago. There are a number of reasons for this. A look at the political concepts of Europe between the two world wars in the 1920s alone shows that European integration today is no straightforward affair and does not bow to determinism. On the contrary, European policy, then as now, will have to choose between specific concepts of Europe. Whereas the Pan-European Union favoured a federation of autonomous nation states, Aristide Briand aimed at federal cooperation between democratic, politically defined nation states. His plans were intended to protect the young democracies from the temptations of authoritarian ideologies and keep them from appropriation and subjection to a cultural New Order by National Socialists and fascists. As it happens, most of today's countries in Central and South Eastern Europe were included in these plans, a fact that points to a broader approach in research on Europe. Fundamental research based on historical but also current approaches could, for instance, investigate the issue of what stance the individual countries had on the concepts of Europe at the time and what part their historical experience plays in their perceptions of Europe today. Wouldn't it be possible to have a federal model that respects the sovereignty of the nation states and is better equipped to balance their interests with common European goals than before?

Today's revival of the concept of the culture-defined nation state from the 19th century raises

the question of whether other societal phenomena prevalent at the time will also reappear. For example, the loss of the necessity for national borders implies a general loss of control on the part of the democratic nation state. This means that many of its civilising achievements, such as its social institutions and its pluralistic culture of constructive debate, come under direct attack. Will such a development lead to the organisation of politics, economic matters and society in self-regulating sub-systems being retracted, bringing the process of modernisation to a standstill? This would enable new concentrations of power to emerge, using culture to monopolise and legitimise their position, similar to the monarchies of the 19th century or dictatorships of the 20th century. That leaves no room for culture as a social corrective. This is exemplified by BRUEGEL, the Brussels think tank, which has government officials cooperating closely with representatives from the world of finance, the IT industry and pharmaceutical companies. With publications such as “The Great Transformation”, it has a direct influence on the distribution of power in the new European Commission and on its political agenda.²¹⁶

Reverting to the nation state system of the 19th century means that it is not only “easier” to manage domestic affairs by side-stepping the democratically legitimised parliaments. It is also getting easier in foreign policy to infringe on the sovereignty rights of neighbouring countries across crumbling borders and interfere with their domestic affairs in the old imperialistic style. Recent disputes about dual nationality show how politicians professing to serve the interests of their citizens surreptitiously aim to sway new, potential voters, seek approval for realigning borders to neighbouring countries or replace with cheap labour those skilled workers who have left the country. It is also these issues of foreign policy that make it necessary for European politics to take a clearer stance in future and decide whether it is for or against its own democratic, welfare-oriented and humanitarian values.

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