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*M. Cotta***THE EU: MULTIPLE CHALLENGES FOR POLITICAL SCIENTISTS**

The article analyzes the most relevant problems of modern political science by studying political developments and institutions in the EU. The author proposes new conceptual and theoretical approaches in studying such areas (research problems) as Politics and market; International Relations and Comparative Politics; Politics and polity; Democracy and technocracy. The new approaches proposed in the article for studies of the EU and their developments have not only contributed to a much better understanding of this very special political reality but also to profit from a different point of view to illuminate phenomena pertaining also to “mainstream politics”. One can argue that they contribute not only to a scientific “widening” but also to a scientific “deepening”. And from being peripheral in comparative political science they have become increasingly central. The article justifies why, besides new concepts, also new research tools (measures, indicators, indexes, typologies) need to be developed that are suitable for the phenomena to be studied.

Keywords: “deepening” and “widening” of knowledge, politics, market, international relations, comparative political science, state, democracy, technocracy.

Political science deepening and widening

The European Union, its institutions, and policy-making processes have increasingly attracted in the last decades the attention of political scientists. The interests has come originally from international relations specialists, then increasingly from students of comparative politics with an interest in governing institutions, parties, policies, etc.

This interest fits into one of the major lines of development of the study of politics. Very much as it has happened with the EU, political science developments can be defined with two words of the European jargon: *deepening* and *widening*. With deepening we can describe the process through which particularly important and visible political phenomena have been explored in depth with increasingly sophisticated methodological efforts to describe them in their fine grained details and to explain the processes which produce them. Probably the best example is that of electoral studies. National elections in democratic states have stimulated “generations” of studies which have been accomplished with increasingly elaborate quantitative tools. The field of party studies can also be ascribed to those which have been “deepened” to a particularly high level.

Knowing more about things about which we already know a lot is a scientific strategy with numerous adepts. This creates a thick community of scholars with a high level of scientific interactions and encourages the building of cumulative learning.

Some critics suggest that this type of scientific development together with important advantages has also some weaknesses. The risk of scholasticism is perhaps the most important. The importance of the topic is sometimes overcome by the focus on the technicalities of the scientific instruments. Moreover, the strongly circumscribed area of research may induce to forget what happens outside and the impact of external phenomena on the one studied.

The other direction may be defined as widening and is directed to the exploration of new phenomena, previously left in the dark as they may have been considered less important both empirically or normatively, or because they were not yet detected. Often this work begins by developing new definitions and typologies, which can help to place the new phenomenon in the existing map of political phenomena. It is an exploration of “hic sunt leones”. A significant amount of descriptive work is required to enlighten areas of political life, which had previously received insufficient attention. Beside new concepts, also new research tools (measures, indicators, indexes, typologies) need to be developed that are suitable for the phenomena to be studied.

Understandably, the new area of studies will appear for some time at least less professionalised than the traditional ones. The build up of a sufficiently consolidated basic knowledge may require significant efforts and time. The positive side is that the exploration of new aspects of politics contributes to a more diversified and less one-dimensional knowledge. It helps to recognize that there more things under the sun...

It is probably fair to say that an advanced political science could not be possible without these two types of development. The deepening is essential to go beyond overly simplistic, or not well grounded interpretations of reality: only with incremental digging can we achieve sufficiently solid results. On the other

hand given the fact that human life is not set for ever but is continuously evolving and experimenting new forms of politics without a constant effort to look away from previously accepted “central phenomena” and to explore peripheral realities we would seriously risk to miss very important aspects of politics.

The first type of studies occupy so to say the centre, the others in some way the periphery. These places are however not necessarily fixed. They may change with time. And peripheral studies may become central and viceversa.

Studying the EU: challenges for political science

The study of the European Union (and earlier of the European Economic Community, then of the European Community) as a political object has for a long period remained rather peripheral in mainstream political science. It was a bit of a ghetto of “Europeanists”, where often a rather normative approach strongly guided by the defence of European Integration as a political project (which of course is absolutely legitimate as many other political projects) has prevented a more detached scientific exploration. This small group of scholars tended also to use a scientific jargon of their own, which was not easily translatable into the common language of political science. Another typical aspect of this first period of European studies was the dominant role played by a sub-discipline of International relations, i.e. the study of International Organisations. Things have significantly changed over the last two decades when an increasingly large group of scholars from different areas of political science have been attracted to this topic. The International relations approach has increasingly been complemented with comparative politics and policy studies approaches. From the periphery of political science the study of the European Union has moved closer to the centre.

Studies of institutions, of parties, of electoral processes, of public opinion, of policy-making, have increasingly contributed to the understanding of this special object.

The special nature of the EU can be seen at the same time as a problem to be overcome and as an enticement for scientific work. On the one hand the process of European integration is in many ways a rather unique phenomenon for which is not easy to find fully comparable examples. As political science relies very significantly on the comparative method to substantiate its hypotheses this situation obviously creates serious obstacles in the study of the EU. It is true that other processes of federation or confederation of plural politically independent units have taken place in history and something can be learnt from them, yet the fact that most of them took place in a not too close past infringes the contemporaneity principle predominantly adopted by contemporary political science. At the same time, however, the very innovative nature of the process might be seen as a challenging opportunity to explore from a different perspective and in a different context some crucial political dilemmas which exist also in “normal politics”.

In this paper I will explore four of these dilemmas. The first concerns the relationship between international and domestic politics; the second between market and politics; the third between politics and polity; the fourth between democracy and technocracy.

International vs domestic politics

As already mentioned this is the aspect which has traditionally received the greatest attention. The difference between the two domains of political life, the relative priority of one over the other or vice versa, the reciprocal influences have been discussed at length within the context of the so called Westphalian era (and its transformations) and with regards to the relationship between the international system and the nation states. The simplified distinction between the anarchy of international society and the monopolistic concentration of power (sovereignty) of nation states if not abandoned has been nuanced to incorporate on one side the limits of the concept of sovereignty of states (Krasner) and on the other to better represent the complexities of the International system.

The progressive development of European integration enables to investigate more carefully a grey area between the international system and traditional nation states. On the one hand the member states maintain and continue to proudly display most of the attributes of sovereignty, the regalia. They continue to be defined the “masters of the treaties” [1 & 9] and through the European Council and the Council of the European Union (previously Council of Ministers) their governments exert a very considerable role in the EU and on many instances they maintain a veto power. In many ways this gives to the EU a flavour of an international organisation. When in the European Council the meetings of the heads of government and heads of state of the member states take place they look very much like other summits of state leaders. On this

ground International relations scholars have for a long time seen the European experiment as part of their scholarly domain.

On the other hand the EEC from its beginnings has been endowed with institutional aspects and powers which, albeit in predefined policy areas, are much more similar to those of national states than to those of international organisations. The Commission and its predecessor the High Authority of the Coal and Steel Community, the Court of Justice and the Common assembly (later the European Parliament) gave to the EEC an institutional structure which in many ways replicated that of democratic states. Over time the EEC/EC/EU has increasingly become more different from IOs. The principle affirmed by the Court of Justice that EU law prevails over national law is one of the most blatant examples, to which could be added the creation of a common currency presided by the European Central Bank, the direct election of the European Parliament and the declaration of a European citizenship. All these elements clearly point away from the IO model and in the direction of domestic political organisations.

At the same time however even the more recent developments continue to show the resilience of the member states which continue to maintain a strong control on crucial aspects of the political life. The persistent weight of national elections and their results on the policy making of the Union, as well as the lack of European coordination of the foreign policies of the MS and of their defence policies are clear examples of this. The recent secession of one of the MS – UK Brexit – shows also the extent to which feelings of national independence can be strong in some of the MSs and can be translated into the decision to recover fully the original sovereignty. The reluctance of two Member states as France and the UK to discuss the idea of converting their special role in the United Nations in a joint European position is another aspect that indicates how the border between international and domestic politics is still undefined and contentious.

The experience of the EU can tell us a lot about the differences between the two levels of politics but also about possible transitions and contaminations between the two.

Market and politics

Political science and economics offer two of the most elaborate discourses for interpreting and explaining social reality. Economics sees in the *market*, a space inhabited and powered by utility calculating individuals intent in exchanging goods (and services), an enormously powerful and diffuse mechanism of social regulation and organisation; and has devoted its attention to deepening the understanding of this reality through highly sophisticated models. On its side political science has highlighted the crucial importance of concentrated authority (Weber's monopoly of legitimate use of physical force) and of physically bounded political communities kept together by shared identities and solidarities (Easton's "authoritative allocation of values in a community").

It is not uncommon (and understandable) that each side proposes its basic principle as the fundamental engine of society and the other one as a subordinate factor. There are elements of truth (but also of unilateralism and reductionism) behind these views. That market and venal exchanges of goods and services play an enormous role in the life of human beings does not require much further debate. And that the powerful forces generated by these processes extend their influence also into the field of politics and produce resources and constraints which politics must reckon with is equally undisputable. Because of this and the reductionist elegance of some of their models, economists sometimes think that they can reduce politics to economics. This dream is however regularly contradicted by events, which show with absolute clarity that politics cannot be reduced to market calculations and that "non-economic" behaviour responding to the peculiar needs of political communities recurrently subordinates market mechanisms, in some extreme cases to the point of eliminating (almost) completely the market as an instrument of social regulation.

The development over time of the EU provides important fuel for the discussion about the borders and the interactions between market and politics. The connection is immediately evident when we remember that the EU starts as the Common Market but is today an organisation with a directly elected parliament, with a common citizenship, a bill of rights, etc.

A more in depth and developmental analysis of the EU can help reveal the complexities of this relationship. We could start from the chicken and egg question: What comes first the market or political organisation? The original name European Economic Community (and before that the European Coal and Steel Community) (which lasted until 1993) seems to suggest the dominant importance of the market dimension in the European process of integration. When ideas of a federal United States of Europe or of a European Defence Community failed to take off, as politically too ambitious, a more economically characterized entity

seemed more able to fly. And it did! But what is behind this “economic” façade? A lot of politics! We can immediately notice that the creation of a unified European market had to overcome the existence of a plurality of “national markets”, which means markets shaped by the different national politics. To overcome this situation a political agreement was needed among these states to accept the opening of “their” markets and their fusion in a “common market”. As it has been rightly pointed, preoccupations of national elites concerning the ability of sovereign national states to face the problems of the post-war reconstruction had an important role in triggering the process of economic unification accompanied by mechanisms of sovereignty devolution [7]. One might naturally add that autonomous economic forces were also behind this transformation: it would be wrong to deny it. The opening of international markets beyond the original area of the EEC after the second world war probably contributed to stimulate this step by making national markets less strong and self sufficient and thus more amenable to the advantages of a broader integration. It is to be remembered however the major role of a political factor - the US world hegemony - in sustaining the process of globalization and of European integration [6].

The history of European integration provides abundant evidence of the connections between market unification and politics. From the beginning it was evident to the builders of Europe that creating a common market was not a process that could be left to the economic actors only. It was not enough to dismantle the borders, which circumscribed nationally the markets it required also a significant delegation and pooling of authority in central institutions that could establish and implement a huge new set of rules without which a common market could not be made. In fact the European Economic Community was from the beginning sustained by an articulate system of institutions endowed with authority. Its developments over time have been made through political and judicial decisions and not through purely economic developments.

Politics has been an indispensable condition for market construction. And politics has from time to time accelerated or slowed the process.

At the same time it is quite obvious that the creation of a unified market being such an important goal of the Union it has given a very special character to the Union itself. The strongest engine and also source of legitimacy of the Union has been the market. Compared to national political institutions the European ones have had a much more bounded scope of action. Negative integration has played a much greater role than positive integration (Scharpf). This has made also for the greater weight of the instrumental and utilitarian legitimacy compared to other less material and more emotional components.

If we look at the historical development of the common market we cannot avoid to highlight that it was recurrently accompanied, so to say, by political steps which have not simply strengthened the different decision making institutions involved in its governance but also produced side effects of a more political nature, such as the establishment of the freedom of movement of persons (a principle which goes well beyond its market relevance) and of a European citizenship.

And the creation of a common currency (and of European Central Bank) was a decision which could be seen as required by the need to make the common market more perfect but had undoubtedly also a clear political relevance as we have seen in the recent crisis when the ECB played a strong leadership role in the defence of the unity of Europe.

Politics and polity

Having ascertained the importance and implications of the political dimension of the economic integration we may now look more carefully into different aspects of the politics of the EU. The first set of questions arises from the distinction between *politics* and *polity*: the two sub-concepts, which we often use to unpack the broader concept of political sphere and which highlight the power and the community, the vertical and the horizontal, dimensions of political life, stimulate some important reflections. Contemporary political science has predominantly studied political phenomena inscribed within the framework of national states and has taken normally for granted the existing definition of the political community on which these states are grounded. The attention has therefore gone to the processes, structures and behaviours, which concern the “authoritative allocation of values” within that community. In other words the study of power, its structure, allocation and dynamics. Only a minority of scholars have focused on the political community as a variable and have made the polity (and its transformative processes) their main object. Stein Rokkan is perhaps the most eminent scholars who has devoted his attention to the complex relations between internal politics and the making and unmaking of polities [10]. To partially correct this picture we must remember that in federal states and where unitary states

have been regionalised or where separatist movements have developed a greater attention has been paid to phenomena of devolution between higher and lower level polities.

When an existing polity (or set of polities) is challenged, or a new one is under construction it becomes necessarily more scholarly interesting to try to understand this dimension of political life and how it is related to other dimensions. The process of European integration and the process of construction of a political community, which goes beyond the existing traditional state units suggest to pay special attention to the polity dimension and to its relationship with politics.

We can start with a plausible proposition: *politics requires a polity*. Politics as a system of authority requires a definition of a (limited) space within which this authority is exercised: Typically a bounded territory and a group of people who more or less willingly accept the commands issued by these authorities and expect a certain range of material or immaterial goods from them. In fact the peculiar intensity and strength of political authority seems to have to do precisely with the limitation and parallel cohesion of that space. Other types of authority (religious, cultural, etc) seem less bounded within a defined space but also less able to enforce in a coercive way their orders. The first proposition highlights then the crucial importance of the processes which establish and maintain a political community. If they fail (and we know it happens) political authority is drastically undermined.

We may also suggest an opposite proposition: *polity requires politics*. Unless we imagine that polities are *God-given*, a natural and original product, and we accept them as artificial entities crafted and shaped through some specific process (sometimes very long and slow, sometimes very fast), we must expect that politics as the process(es) by which power is accumulated and concentrated will play a role in this. The historical experiences of known polities indicate rather clearly the important role played in the establishment, enlargement and conservation of polities by (individual or collective) actors who have been able to control and mobilise resources adaptable to this purpose.

To some extent also this relationship has elements of circularity or recursiveness. Authority, in order to become stabilised and to obtain continuity over time requires an established relationship with a defined space/community. At the same time a political community needs an authority system to be kept together and not to succumb to centrifugal drives. This circular process has variable rhythms and intensities over time. There are “creational” moments and “maintenance” periods. Moments when the polity issue takes a dominant role becoming “the” crucial issue of political life and others when the polity is more or less forgotten, is taken for granted as if its existence was automatic, natural.

More in general the dynamic relationship between polity and politics has received less attention than required.

The slow but momentous process of European integration provides significant opportunities for the scholar to scrutinize this relationship in its negative and positive aspects. The resilience of national identities and national polities is a crucial factor affecting and constraining the development of European integration and influences significantly the possibility of transferring powers to the more supranational central institutions of the EU and even more affects the possibility of conceiving broad common interests. The complex configuration of the EU institutions, and in particular the strong role of institutions representing the national governments reflects very clearly the reluctance in downgrading the existing national polities and the need to have them well represented and in control of crucial decisions. These institutions, as a consequence of their configuration, will elaborate European decisions only starting from already well defined national interests.

At the same time one should not disregard the steps forward which have created a significant European space beyond the national one. To a very large extent, as we have said, this is an economic/market space: but not only. It deserves our attention the fact that at some point of its history the Union felt the need to define and enshrine in its treaties the concept of *European citizenship*. It is a “derived” citizenship, granted on the basis of the possession of a national citizenship (very much as in Switzerland), yet it is a citizenship which entails a set of rights [4]. Before this legal step, the creation in the 1980s of “regional funds” directed to reduce somewhat the distances in economic level between regions of Europe suggests that the idea of a community where a common solidarity across nations is required was gaining a place in the EU.

During the recent economic and migration crises the problem of solidarity and burden sharing in the space of the Union has become much more acute due to the fact that these crises have hit with different intensity the member states. To what extent a member state hit by the economic and financial crisis with serious problems of economic recession, unemployment or of access to the financial markets, or suffering an extraordinary inflow of migrants should be entitled to a substantial help from the Union? For both crises the

political debate both on principles and on practical measures was and continues to be very heated. Different positions have been voiced recurrently during the last years by political leaders and parties: on one side the position that the Union should not be a “transfer Union” and that the responsibility for crisis situations should rest fundamentally on the shoulders of national governments; on the other the position that principles of solidarity and the idea of a “common boat” should be upheld. And that a major achievement of the Union, the Economic and Monetary Unions, and the common currency as its symbol and tool should be reserved. Beyond the philosophical and normative debates, a number of practical steps have been implemented which embody in some way the existence (and growth) of a European community. The emergency funds (EFSF and ESM) built after 2010 to deal with threatening financial and debt difficulties arising in many member states are (whatever the evaluation of their rules and functional mechanisms) a significant indicator of the principle of solidarity. The same could be said about the instruments developed by the ECB from 2011 onwards in order to save the EMU by supporting national governments and national economies. The counterpart of these instruments of solidarity was the building of rules of fiscal austerity (or of discipline if we prefer) which subordinate the national budgetary processes to the authority of the Commission. In matters of immigration the acceptance of a rule of redistribution faced a very hard resistance (it would be interesting to compare with within national redistributions) showing that the nature of the issue (economic in one case, identitarian and cultural in the other) can make a big difference. In the EU the community of economic destiny is much more advanced than a community of cultural identities.

An empirical approach to this topic is that which measures the feelings of attachment to the EU and of identification with it. Abundant survey data show the weaker degree of attachment and identification as compared to similar attitudes towards the country of belonging. They also show that in most of the cases Europe is not seen as a competitor with the nation state but as a complement. People can identify with their country but also with the European Union.

The existence (and the strength) of a political community is often linked to the question of democracy. If democracy is about a demos empowered to control political authorities, how can there be a democracy in the EU if there is not a demos (or it is at best a very weak one)? This point has generated a broad discussion and also the proposal to think in terms of a *demoicracy*, i.e. a regime where respecting the plurality of *demos* certain features of democracy can be applied to a context which remains different [8 & 2]. But is the demos (or the *demos*) a given or is it rather a reality which is to some extent plastic and that can be shaped and re-shaped? The question concerns then the presence or absence, the strength or weakness of actors and processes which can contribute to shaping a European demos out of a plurality of *demos*.

Exploring the specific nature of the EU polity and its consequences upon European politics can offer important stimuli to expand our views about what a polity is or can be and to relativize the classical state as the polity model.

Democracy and technocracy

Another interesting topic which emerges when studying the EU and the process of European integration concerns the relationship between democracy and technocracy, between the government of politicians and the government of experts. It is quite common both in political and scientific discourse to criticise the European Union for its democratic deficit and for the predominance of technocratic features. But the topic with its normative and empirical aspects has received recurrent attention also within national politics. In countries where democratic ideals and norms are the dominant values it is assumed that elected politicians accountable to the people should occupy the preeminent political positions. This role is legitimised by the fact of being the representatives of the people and thus supposedly in the best position to interpret the interests of the population. Technocrats might advise them to translate these interests in the best policy solutions but should not take their position. Reality shows that the picture is more complex. Democratic systems may in fact leave a significant space to technocracy, both within the typical democratic institutions such as cabinets [3] and with the ample autonomy left to fully technocratic institutions (such as Central Banks and other Independent Authorities). Behind the autonomy granted to such institutions is the more or less explicit idea that elected politicians may be trapped by the electoral dynamics into “short-termism”, subordinating long term and more durable interests to the short-term interests which emerge with recurrent elections. Technocratic institutions and authorities should therefore protect the former interests against electioneering. If this opens the space for a significant influence of technocracy, political authorities maintain in the end a superior position over technocratic ones.

In the European Union the balance between technocratic and representative institutions is much more favourable to the latter than in national states. Two concomitant factors concur to enhance the role of technocracy in the EU: the first is the nature of the Union itself and of its peculiar sphere of responsibilities; the second is the weakness of the political/representative centre of government. The fact that the Union was endowed from the beginning with predominantly regulatory functions (and with little distributive or redistributive resources) (Majone) was in itself a powerful factor strengthening the role of a technocracy able to devise and administer these rules. If we add to this that European mechanisms of political representation were and remain rather weak in spite of the direct election of the European Parliament, we have a powerful mix in favour of technocratic rule. How does this affect the governance of the Union? Of course as it is often said that weakens significantly the democraticness of the Union. The electoral accountability of EU authorities is significantly reduced compared to that of national authorities. Yet there may be a paradox in this: the heavy role of the technocratic element makes the EU perhaps less democratic (less influenced by representative processes and less accountable to the people), but ...it makes it more European, as the European technocracy is much more devoted to the unity of the European community than many democratic actors which remain fundamentally based at the national level! And by being more European it is in a better position to defend the common interests of the Union! The recent economic and financial crisis has provided some evidence in this direction. It would not be unwarranted to say that the action of the ECB (the most technocratic institution of the EU) was more openly and boldly supportive of the unity of the Union than that of the "democratic" leaders represented in the European Council in a moment when centrifugal drives were challenging its survival. Less technocracy (a weaker ECB) could well have meant less Europe and a less effective protection of common interests.

Can we come to say that technocrats may be better representatives of the interests of a polity than elected politicians? Possibly yes! But on the other hand we should not forget that technocrats are not "angels": we need to understand more carefully to whom they respond and by which principles, ideas and interests they are guided! We have advanced theories about the behaviour of politicians but less advanced ones about the behaviour of technocrats.

Conclusion

As I have shortly sketched here, the studies of the EU and their developments have not only contributed to a much better understanding of this very special political reality but also to profit from a different point of view to illuminate phenomena pertaining also to "mainstream politics". We can thus say that they contribute not only to a scientific "widening" but also to a scientific "deepening". An from being peripheral in comparative political science they have become increasingly central.

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ЕС: МНОГОУРОВНЕВЫЕ ВЫЗОВЫ ДЛЯ ПОЛИТОЛОГОВ

Анализируются наиболее актуальные проблемы современной политологии на примере изучения политических процессов и институтов ЕС. Автор предлагает новые концептуальные и теоретические подходы при изучении таких областей (исследовательских проблем), как политика и рынок; международные отношения и сравнительная политология; политика и политологическое сообщество; демократия и технократия. Предложенные в статье новые подходы при изучении ЕС и его достижений помогают не только лучше понять вышеперечисленные специфические политические реальности, но и дают возможность по-новому взглянуть на явления, относящиеся к так называемой «господствующей политике». Можно утверждать, что они позволяют не только «расширить» научные знания, но и значительно их «углубить». Находясь на периферии изучения сравнительной политологии, данные знания (на основе новых подходов) занимают все более центральное место. Обосновывается, почему, кроме новых концепций, также необходимо создавать другие исследовательские инструменты (меры, индикаторы, индексы, типологии), нацеленные на изучение различных явлений.

Ключевые слова: «углубление» и «расширение» политологических знаний, политика, рынок, международные отношения, сравнительная политология, государство, демократия, технократия.

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