

McCormick, J., 2013, *Why Europe Matters. The Case for the European Union*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp. XIV + 198.

The timing of the publication of this concise volume could not have been better as since late 2007 European Union is in crisis. The turmoil in the world's financial markets quickly affected the general economy, subsequently creating social and political crises (as Werner Weidenfeld has recently tersely put it: "Der Kontinent driftet von Problem zu Problem"; from: Weidenfeld, W., 2014, *Europa. Eine Strategie*, Kösel-Verlag, München, p. 13). Simultaneously, serious structural weaknesses of the eurozone also had been revealed. Not every member state was/is affected by these crises in equal measure; nevertheless, the tensions arising from them were/are seriously jeopardizing this advanced and unique variant of supranational cooperation. The unpopularity of the policies responding to the crisis/crises, e.g. austerity and tight budgetary supervision, compounded with the openly expressed irritation at the actions of certain member states (especially Germany – the supposed, albeit unwilling, 'leader' of the EU and the continent's biggest economy) or of the EU institutions (especially, at least up to a certain point in time, of the European Central Bank) resulted in serious and numerous questions being raised about the future of the European project. It was assumed that the European Union was at a crossroads. In consequence, it was legitimate to ask, if it should (or deserve to) continue?

The last elections to the European Parliament proved that significant portion of the European voters are disillusioned with the EU (it is palpable not only among the avowed Eurosceptics). One of the causes behind such attitude is the lack of clarity among the EU-wide electorate as regards the accomplishments of the EU. In other words, what makes the EU important? What do we owe to the EU? And finally – why it should be continued?

Such questions are the point of departure of McCormick's considerations. His intension is straightforward: if the European project (not only the EU is being discussed by the author, but for obvious reason it interests him the most) is being called into question, and theoretically at least, the possibility of its dismantling may arise, it

is necessary to learn first what might be lost in such a scenario. In short, the author's answer is – a lot. Below the general outline of McCormick's nuanced argumentation will be discussed.

The EU is perceived by McCormick as a model of peaceful coexistence. This model rests upon two pillars. The first is a laboriously built culture of cooperation. This is a logical consequence of the original integrationist idea: it cannot be fulfilled without collaboration. What is crucial is that this culture is institutionalized in the form of various bodies, which serve as the EU-wide channels of communication, helping to attenuate potentially dangerous and destabilizing tensions. The second, is a certain kind of the European identity, built upon a set of “[p]atterns of behaviour, shared values and common experiences.” At the same time, McCormick reminds the reader, the qualities defining the Europeans (e.g. support for democracy, human rights or multilateralism) do not substitute various national identities. European and national identities are parallel and mutually enforcing. It is important to notice that both pillars are being constantly perfected and strengthened with further integration.

The resulting lasting peace in the EU and the relative affluence correlated with it, constitute the basis for European soft power, strengthened by the EU's attitudes towards its outside partners (its *modus operandi* is meetings instead of missiles, as McCormick puts it). The culture of dialogue and cooperation (these are the basic elements of the EU's civilian power and as well as of its political model) epitomized by the EU, might be ahead of its time – especially when it comes to the calls for the implementation of such a model on a global scale – nevertheless McCormick has no doubts that this is the right path to follow and that with time current, often unilateral, attitudes may change. On the other hand, the EU in its capacity as a global player already skillfully uses its multilateral experience in certain fields, for example in its efforts trying to built a global consensus on environmental policies.

Even in the face of the Euro-crisis, McCormick clearly sees various benefits of the European single market. It is not only a source of prosperity, but also – among other things – lessens psychological barriers between Europeans, contributes to the investment in the pan-European infrastructure networks or enforces the introduction of various EU-wide standards (e.g. related to the environment). He

is also of the opinion that with its current institutional framework the EU is not facing a stark democracy deficit, as at this moment it is basically a confederation of states (this is probably the most important theoretical feature of the discussed volume). In consequence, states wield a decisive influence over its aims, policies etc. The democratic rights of the EU citizens however, are acknowledged and represented directly (e.g. European Parliament) and indirectly (e.g. the Council of Ministers) at the European level.

McCormick's book very efficiently achieves its aim. By the end probably most unprejudiced readers would easily agree that Europe indeed matters and is of high importance not only for the European states but for their global partners too (among the Europeans it is often perceived as a source of stability and economic prosperity; for the outside world it is an important inspiration, as it symbolizes the culture of a democratic consensus). What is crucial in this book's reception is the author's integrity: he gives the EU a credit where it is due, and yet he unambiguously indicates what are its imperfections and where improvement is not only possible but necessary (e.g. the balancing of the eurozone; innovation). In the author's opinion, at the moment the EU primarily needs stability. As a result, it should function as a formalized confederation, pursuing the aims stemming from the spirit of the Laeken Declaration (2001) – efficiency, the completion of the unfinished tasks and work towards the deeper engagement of the EU citizens in its matters. Such a refined union, due to the merits discussed above, could successfully continue as the only reasonable liberal alternative to the dominant realist paradigm.

Probably McCormick's book is not going to convince the committed foes of the EU/Europe. At the same time however, in order to make their case trustworthy, it will be necessary to refute his multi-layered argumentation. Even for the most skilled among them, this would be a formidable challenge.

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