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ASYMMETRIC INTERDEPENDENCE, POWER, AND CRISIS IN INTEGRATED SYSTEMS

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Abstract: *As the interdependence intensifies, the European project is increasingly challenged by the implications of asymmetric distribution of power among allied states. The aim of this paper is to elaborate a synthetic theoretical approach in order to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the role cultural factors in determining the collective action and multilateral collaboration of the member states in the context of the apparently benign interdependence. In order to bring more light into the dynamics of the EU in the context of asymmetric interdependence we use a synthetic scientific approach combining the rationalist view on culture of institutional liberalism with the social constructivist perspective, focusing on both constitutive and causal effects of culture on conflict / cooperation relations.*

Keywords: EU dynamics, culture, asymmetric interdependence, synthetic approach.

1. Introduction

In order to bring more insight into the dynamics of the role of culture in the European Union structure as a whole, and more specific on the enlargement process to the CEE, we consider it would be efficient to utilize a synthetic scientific approach combining the rationalist view of institutional liberalism with the constructivist perspective, with the purpose to obtain a more coherent and complex conceptual understanding regarding this phenomenon. We will at least try to begin to answer questions such: (a) why the existing theories / approaches of IR fail to provide a comprehensive assessment method of the role of cultural factors in determining the collective

action and multilateral collaboration of the member states? and (b) how the scientific approaches can be improved in order to constitute a more appropriate tool to serve this purpose in the context of the apparently benign interdependence within the EU?

2. A synthetic theoretical approach on the role of culture in the EU enlargement to CEE

One of the most important events in the history of the EU was the enlargement to include Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. The collapse of the Soviet Union generated similar reactions in almost all countries in CEE (with the exception Yugoslavia): all wanted primary, to join NATO (security guarantee) and secondly, to join the EU (development guarantee). The European Union was frequently mentioned as an example of effective multilateral cooperation - and in 2012, this recognition culminated with the Nobel Peace Prize award since for over six decades (EU) contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe. However, as the interdependence intensifies, the European project is increasingly challenged by the implications of asymmetric distribution of power among allied states. Asymmetries in relationships are the ones which can lead to disputes. The different forms of multilateral cooperation represent simultaneously a reaction to conflict and a permanent exposure to the prospect of conflict.

The aim of this paper is to elaborate a synthetic theoretical approach in order to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the role cultural factors in determining the collective action and multilateral collaboration of the member states in the context of the apparently benign interdependence. In order to bring more light into the dynamics of EU in the context of asymmetric interdependence we use a synthetic scientific approach combining the rationalist view on culture of institutional liberalism with the social constructivist perspective, focusing on both constitutive and causal effects of culture on conflict / cooperation relations.

Constructivism is not a rival theoretical approach in relation to rationalism, and the two theoretical positions do not essentially oppose each other, but constructivism is rather a complementary perspective, and it has a considerable contribution in demonstrating the power of ideas and norms in the construct of global politics.

In this endeavor we will focus on one single form of constructivism, more precisely, on systemic constructivism. The project formulated by Alexander Wendt offers the only real example of this form of constructivism and this moderate version of constructivism („Social Theory of International Politics”) is the most useful approach in developing the hypothesis advanced in this article.

The conflict between the systemic approaches and the reductionist ones in explaining international politics represented a strong demarcation line in international theories. If, according to realist terminology, the liberal institutionalism is considered a systemic theory, Wendt’s constructivism, although systemic according to the same terminology, combines the two types of theories, considering impossible and erroneous the differentiation of the two, and it builds a synthetic vision of what he refers to as the microstructure and the macrostructure of the international system.

The concept of structure of international politics in the neoliberal view refers to anarchy and the distribution of material capabilities. Constructivism, although accepting the existence of some strictly material elements within the social systems, argues that these elements have little explanatory value.

Wendt argues that “if interests consist largely of ideas, this means that social systems are also structured by the distributions of knowledge” (Wendt, 2011:156) Wendt defines knowledge as *any belief an actor takes to be true* (offering as an example in this respect the American’s and the Soviet’s beliefs in 1950 that they were enemies), where knowledge can be private or shared.

However, our thematic focus here is the social shared knowledge, i.e., culture, which can be both of conflictual or cooperative dispositions.

The approach of culture in international politics from the perspective of international regimes employed by most neoliberals in the field of international relations involves the same concept of “*interconnected beliefs*” also preferred by constructivists and utilized under the term of common knowledge. Norms, institutions, regimes, are all consisting of common knowledge or, in Wendt’s terminology, of “intersubjective understanding.”

The interconnected beliefs also represent an important theme for Keohane and Nye who explain that „the national interest can change through learning (...) and learning means changing your own beliefs as a result of new information – (...) where a type of learning of this kind is deepening the awareness of strategic interdependence” (Keohane, Nye 2011: 348-349).

The point of fracture between the two views consists of the ways of analyzing the effects of the common knowledge. For liberal institutionalism, the beliefs shared through learning processes and normative changes / evolutions lead to increased cooperation, i.e., the cultural factor has a **causal effect** on cooperation and conflict relations and is to be taken into account only to the extent that it affects the actors' strategies, otherwise, being considered a neutral factor.

For constructivists, the common knowledge has **constitutive effects**, and it represents a two-way street, both in the direction of cooperation as well as conflict. In order to assert this argument Wendt explains this phenomenon using the term "collective knowledge" in durkheimian acceptance.

For explanatory purposes, it becomes instrumental to enunciate the main differences between the two approaches.

From the neoliberal spectrum, we reiterate the **causal effects** of beliefs shared through international regimes identified by Keohane and Nye, such as: (1) can change the standard operating procedures (SOP) of national bureaucracies; (2) may present new opportunities to form coalitions for sub-national actors and improved access to third parties; (3) can change participant's attitudes through contracts within institutions; (4) can provide information about the rules, which facilitates learning about the behavior of others and (5) can help detach one problem from the rest, thus facilitating learning in specialized groups of negotiators (Keohane, Nye 2011: 350).

From the constructivist spectrum, the phenomenon of collective knowledge revolves around the idea that "group beliefs are inscribed in the collective memory (...) where groups acquire their identity in the course of time only on the basis of these memories. As long as individuals perceive themselves as having loyalty and commitment to a group, collective memories will be available as a resource for mobilizing collective action, even when these are not believed in the phenomenological sense by individuals, and thus, can help explain patterns of aggregate behavior" (Wendt, 2011:176).

A synthetic vision on shared knowledge is the most effective method to address shared beliefs problem (i.e. cultural factors) that have both causal and constitutive effects on action.

The European Union is a compelling example of how elements belonging to both views (both causal and constitutive) operate in international politics.

From the rationalist point of view, the cultural forms (in the neoliberal terminology: common mental models acquired through complex learning processes (Nye, 1987:371) such as norms, institutions, rules, organizations etc., have causal effects on collective action through changing perceptions, beliefs, and finally through normative change.

Nye and Keohane argue that, in this way, „practices or interests that are accepted a while come to be denigrated or even become illegitimate in a subsequent period because normative developments” (Keohane, Nye 2011: 348).

In the case of the European Union we can observe the normative changes that occurred as a result of the functions carried out by organizations (NATO) and institutions (of governments collectively organized as the European Council and of Council of Ministers) – and of supranational institutions: the European Commission, the European Court of Justice and the European Parliament.

As noted above, the national interest can change through learning, and the EU constitutes a practical example of such change of perceptions on national interest. In today’s Europe no one can imagine that the military dictatorship can represent an actual threat. For those who are familiar with the history of the European states this is a genuine miracle, and this is possible due to the the enlargement of the EU and NATO, and also due to the fact that today it is almost impossible to think in terms of armed conflict between European nations and this is an incredible transformation since Europe was the continent of wars throughout history.

From the constructivist point of view, where, in Wendt’s terminology – „culture is more than the sum of shared ideas that individuals bear in mind, it is a phenomenon supported at the community level” (Wendt, 2011:177) – cultural forms receive another interpretation.

Referring to probably one of the most important and complicated moments in the history of the European Union, namely the extension to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, an explanation from the constructivist perspective for the success of this endeavor would be the existence of a key resource capable to mobilize the populations of the recently freed nations in order to respond in such an enthusiastic manner to the proposal to join the EU.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 led to the end of a Europe divided between two non-European superpowers (U.S. in the West and the USSR in the East) and marked the beginning of a transition process in Central and Eastern Europe. The collapse of the Soviet Union generated

similar reactions in almost all countries in CEE (with the exception Yugoslavia): all wanted primary, to join NATO (security guarantee) and secondly, to join the EU (development guarantee).

This transition process has often been described as the "return to Europe" or "reconnecting with Europe." Expressions used in this period accurately reflect the constructivist intuition which stands behind the desire of the elites from the young democracies, but also of a significant proportion of their population: the key resource in this case is represented by the collective memory that throughout the entire history after World War II and to the end of the Cold War, the nations of Central and Eastern Europe were victims of Soviet communist regime.

It can be said therefore, according to the constructivist argument, that the integration process is a consequence of the fact that the the collective memories and therefore collective knowledge is a resource for mobilizing collective action and that this is a reality that can not be ignored when talking about social change: „once created the collective memories, their long-term effects can be difficult shaken even if a majority of individuals has forgotten them at any given time” (Wendt, 2011:177).

The model al cultural approach presented by Wendt grants an equal weight to agency and structure. In his view, the two are mutually constituted and co-determined and the dependence of structure to the agency and to the social process is both constitutive and causal.

This relationship between structure and agents in Wendt’s terminology suggests that "culture is a self fulfilling prophecy.”

3. Conclusion

This hypothesis can be expressed by the following example: „once the cultural formation known as the European Union has been set up, the EU Member States have acquired the shared belief that they are partners, which contributed to the construction of their identities and interests, in any given circumstances, and their identities and interests were underlying the actions that have reconfirmed to alterities status of partners, thus reproducing EU formation” (Wendt, 2011).

Following this logic, we can conclude that, interdependence, facilitating the flow of information and, therefore, the complex learning processes, and also the distribution of

knowledge, has not only causal effects (normative reconstruction of identities), but also constitutive effects (the formation of new identities).

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