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**Panel 5D Capturing Diversifying Integration: Beyond the Intergovernmentalism –
Supranationalism Dichotomy**

**Common Problems, Situations and Concepts: A Pragmatist-
Conceptual approach towards European Integration**

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Introduction

The first years of the new century have been troubled years for the European Union. So they have been for the academic study of it. Yet the years *since* 'the true *annus horribilis* of the European Union' (Majone 2005) have been marked by less troubles. The claim of a turn towards normalcy has also been made with regard to EU studies. A 'Europe without illusions' is thus to be accompanied by EU studies that show again "the common sense of European integration" (Majone 2006), by addressing how things really are *and* work. The intellectual tools to allow for such an undistorted analysis are said to be available in 'normal political science.' Philosophical debates are to be left behind in favor of empirical ones (Moravscik 2008).

It is a valid observation that some of the debates of the early decade have been marked by too high aspirations and possibly too ambitious concepts that carried them, such as 'a political Europe', 'a European Constitutional moment', 'a European identity', 'a European public sphere' and 'a European society.' It is, however, not a valid observation that anything like 'normalcy' has entered the study of the European Union. Rather, fundamental conceptual disputes remain, which shape the very questions of what are the important phenomena that one should look at and what are the important questions that one might want to ask. In other words, we are left as much as before with the

necessity to address to so called philosophical or theoretical inquires – or, in the terminology that will be preferred in the following: questions of concepts and conceptualisations. These continuing disputes, however, are often led in terms that are strongly guided by the disciplinary divides within *political science*. While IR is – or at least was - responsible for the overall question 'how and why European integration proceed', so called 'comparative politics' is in charge of analysing the working of the already established 'political system of the EU', while political theory seems to have been delegated the task of normative evaluation.

However, these categorizations and their respective allocation of intellectual tasks do not hold in many regards. The question of the outcome of integration has always been a central for theories of integration: In turn, those that focus on the analysis of the workings of the 'system' hold, implicitly, strong assumption of the nature of the already established system. As to the division of labor between empirical-analytical kind of work and 'normative', the normative concerns have been implicit all along. In the more recent debates it is apparent that the assumption as to the nature of the EU in view of the 'facts' strongly influence also the normative evaluation, often in form of prescription how to fix the thus identified EU. *Because* it is a regulatory state, legitimacy is taken care of yet it should also not go beyond the status quo (Majone); because it is a – albeit highly developed – International Organization, it is desirable as it is, yet should also avoid further experiments that would attempt to essentially change and go beyond this status (Moravcsik); because it is a political system (like any other), it should have the same features as a parliamentary democracy (Hix).

It is more helpful to focus on issues that are carried through most, if not all of these debate. One can speak of three concerns in particular. The first is the question of the how to evaluate the the EU as to its desirability. It is a lead in terms of the critique and justification of the 'real existing EU'. The second is about the question of the familiarity or novelty of the phenomenon EU; it is extended into the debates whether our concepts are still valid with regard to analysis as well as with regard to normative evaluation.¹ The third unresolved dispute concerns the questions whether the EU should

¹This question of familiarity versus novelty matters for two reasons: for some, disciplinary concerns seem at stake; for other, more dominantly located in Europe itself, the concern is a more normative and political one. It concerns the questions, which standards of evaluation should be applied to the EU; more specifically, it is often carried by the concern that the claim for the novelty (or here in particular: the *sui generis* character) of this arrangement of governance renders the normative standards for evaluating a polity that we are – allegedly – familiar with, inadequate as outdated. The fear thereby is that we become contented with arrangements that are in comparison to the condition of the nation-state normatively deficient (Offe). It is, thus, obvious, that in the scholarly controversies around the familiarity or novelty of the EU also partisan concerns play a – if not the major – role: be it within the disciplinary controversies, be it with concern for the actual political implications.

actually be conceived as a polity or not – a question which precedes the much more frequently – and without a doubt relevant – question of *what kind* of polity the EU is.

The three issues – desirability and viability; novelty or familiarity; polity or not - are linked. In the following, though, I will address the question of 'the nature of the EU' by focusing on the last issue: whether to understand the EU as a polity and, if yes, what might be helpful conceptualizations of this EU polity. The question of 'familiarity versus novelty' will then be addressed towards the end, while the question on desirability will not be explicitly addressed, though some elements will be advanced as to the basis for a more nuanced assessment of this question. Thus, I will proceed in the remainder of this paper in three broad steps: first, I will engage into the debate about which categorization from the repertoire of political thought might fit best the present European Union. Here, the reasons for the emergence of the 'polity-turn' in EU studies will be reconstructed and problematic features of this turn highlighted. Second, the paper will provide an new and fairly open conceptualization of the EU qua polity, which will take agreements to act in common in view of problematic situations in their center. Third, the question of how to situate the EU in space and time, that is in European political history, for the purpose of better grasping any specificity of this EU polity will be discussed.

I Understanding the EU as a polity

A overview of work in the social and political sciences from the last roughly fifteen years that took the EU as their central object of analysis will suggest that the EU is, in principle, not longer an unidentified political object. Rather, it appears that a minimal consensus has been reached by identifying the EU as a *polity*. A reason for the establishment of this claim within a fairly short period of time – arguably from the mid to late 1990s to the first years of the new century – lies in its very openness of the term. This openness and ambiguity is, not the least due to it not having been used in the academic vocabulary about things political in a long time (, it is still not used much, if at all, in public political discussions, a fact that should not be easily overlooked). In fact, a look at the literature(s) of much of the 20th Century reveals that the term had hardly been used at all.² Much more common were notions such as 'society', 'nation', and, foremost, the two key concepts of (the)

² There are few discussions of the polity concept – and the range of its possible applicability. A notable exception is Ferguson/ Mansbach (1996). For the explicit usage of the polity concept with regard to the global dimension cf. Higgott/ Ougaard (2002). For a use in the context of normative political theory cf. Hamlin/ Pettitt (2000). And for a conception of “*The Economy as a Polity*”, cf. Joerges/ Stråth/ Wagner (2005).

‘state’ and ‘political system.’³ Apart from the notion ‘political system’, these other term to speak about political phenomena of large scales (I take the term *macro*-phenomenon not to be very insightful) were assumed not to ‘fit’ the present (and possibly not the future) EU. Thus, the term polity came to prominence partly by default. Even more, the very previous scarcity of employment of the concept of ‘polity’ seems to have facilitated it being used with a very thin layer of connotations.

Nevertheless, a very broad meaning seems to have been held in common by those using the term. Thus, in a wide sense, the polity designation fulfills the task to conceive of the EU as an entity in its own right, thus as something that is not merely derivative of the nation-states. One refers to polity-ness of the EU in terms of it being ‘*self-standing*’ entity, or: ‘*self-standing political community*’ (Walker). Arguably, however, such a designation of it being ‘self-standing’ does not help much further. Very often, the term is used almost interchangeably with other broad notions such as ‘political order’, ‘political organization’, ‘macro-political form’, ‘political institutions’. All of these notions are examples of high abstraction in academic discourse.

In turn, this openness of the concept went hand in hand with it being used hardly ever without a qualification with (at least) one qualifying adjective. In the specifications of the term ‘polity’, different dimensions are referred to. A first group of qualifications relates to ideas of ‘form and substance’. Thus, in a broadly institutionalist mode of analysis, concerning its *form* or *structure* (or: configuration) one refers to a ‘prismatic polity’ (Laffan 1996), a ‘compound polity’ (Fabrini 2005b; Chrysochoou 2001), a ‘multi-level European polity’ (Scharpf 1999), or of a ‘European federation’ (Weiler 2001). All these notions seem to suggest a difference to ideas of ‘unity’ and ‘centralisation.’ With regards to its ‘(cultural)composition’, one reads notions of a ‘multi-cultural polity’ (Müller 2004), ‘supra-national European polity’ (Weiler et al. 1995) and a ‘multinational polity’ (Kraus 2004).

A second group of qualifications places emphasis on *temporality* and *historicity*. Thus, in a comparative-historical perspective, concepts of a ‘post-Westphalian polity’ (Vam Ham 2000a), a ‘neo-Medieval polity’ (Waever 1996), ‘post-statal, post-national polity’ (Walker 2003c), or of a ‘post-modern polity’ (Ruggie 1998a) are evoked. Thereby, it is suggested that the European Union as a decisive part of the new or emerging political order in Europe is qualitatively different from

3 Cf. Münkler (1996) for a study of different models of political order, which are ‘Empire, nation and Europe.’ Cf. here also the typology of political forms developed by Manent (2001), which are: the tribe, the city-state, empire and the nation. Manent doubts that Europe can and will become a viable political form.

pervious such orders and their defining features (such as ‘stateness’ or ‘the nation.’ Notions which also imply a temporal dimension, but relate this to the ‘stage of development’ (or: ‘maturity’) of the EU are ‘partial polity’ (Christiansen et al. 1999), ‘emerging polity’ (Curtin 1997), ‘embryonic polity’ (Laffan et al. 2000), a ‘contested polity’ (Banschoff/ Smith 1999; Lord 2003), and, already at a very early stage, ‘*Europe’s Would-Be Polity*’ (Lindberg Scheingold 1970). They imply that that the European polity has either not yet reached its/a final state (or: *finalité*), is not yet consolidated, or might in fact never reach such a stage.⁴

These qualifications might seem excuses for not being able to say more specifically what the nature of the EU polity is by evoking similarly unspecific notions. Yet, these attempts of qualifications to serve as indicators for the themes that are at stake in the attempts to 'capture conceptually' the EU and can serve thereby as orientations. For this reasons, we will return explicitly to both these issues – the question of the 'form' of this polity as well as to its localization in space and time – later in this paper. The broad usage of the term polity just as the broad range of additional qualification of the nature this EU polity, should however not suggest that the usage of the polity concept is uncontroversial and should be taken for granted. Instead, I would suggest that the polity-turn should not be taken too casually. Four observations suggest to take more scrutiny is using the polity concept with regard to the EU.

First, the consensus can actually not be found in the community of those writing on the EU. Indeed, some scholars continue analyzing and evaluating the EU without ever using the polity designation, most often simply using the designation EU to denote the object of their analysis. More importantly, though, others explicitly put into question the polity-nature and propose instead other, most often less ambitious, designations. Yet again other directly deny the polity claim, by maintaining that the EU is essentially still an International organization; a perception that seems to have found renewed support after the failure of the – failed – Constitutional episode. Here, the essence of the EU is seen in being an institutional arrangement in and through which member states can co-ordinate their policies.

Second, this move of a designation is not a mere exercise in taxonomy, but as much as a claim with normative implications as a simple matter of categorization/ classification. Taking the 'polity-turn' is to a significant degree as normative turn. It carries with it the opening up – for others necessary

4 At times, these qualifications are combined so that the conception of an ‘unprecedented, multi-level, multi-functional European post-statal polity’ (Walker 2005) is proposed.

imposition/ unavoidable task – of other registers of evaluation. Indeed, the suggestion of the EU as a ‘political entity’ has, however, not just been a statement of ‘facticity’ (Shaw/ Wiener 1999). Rather, the polity turn encompassed as many, if not more, discussion of what the EU-as-polity *should* be. The impression seemed not unfounded that there was a *Wahlverwandschaft* (‘elective affinity’) between the two concepts ‘polity’ and ‘legitimacy.’⁵ These suggestions as to the desirability and viability – the two core components of the concept ‘legitimacy’ - were voiced both in the public-political discourse as in the more specifically academic one.

Different debates have been led in this 'normative turn' in EU studies. A first one focused on the 'legitimacy of the EU regime': the distribution of powers between the three main institutions, their transparency, their ‘democratic credentials’ or possible substitutes in an assumed lack of democratic procedures compared to those we are more familiar with have been at the core of this debate (cf. for many Lord/ Magnette 2001; Maduro 2002; Schmitter 2000). A second strand argued that irrespective of the desirability and viability of the workings of the institutions, an EU polity was taken to require ‘something in addition’ to these institutional structures in order to be legitimate: the much-mentioned *European Öffentlichkeit* was here one key term, the quest for a ‘European identity’, ‘commonalities of the Europeans’ and a ‘community of experience and interpretation’ a different one. Third, while both fair and working institutions as well a ‘political collectivity’, however conceived, are important, others again point to the necessity of an Europeanization of substantial political problems for a desirable and viable European polity. Two such areas have been in the focus of the debate since the mid 1990s, discussed under the familiar labels of a ‘Social Europe’ and ‘Europe as a global player’. These challenges that are faced are thus on the one hand ‘the effects of globalization’, the ‘new social question’, ‘solidarity’ and ‘redistribution’ (to use common terms) and on the other hand, influencing the ‘new world order’, strengthening ‘international law’ and constituting an ‘actual counterweight to a global hegemon.’

Third, the previous paragraph showed that different normative arguments could be build on the basis of the polity-claim (, just as the polity claim can be made on the basis of different substantial arguments). This indicates that in the different usages of the polity concept with regard to the EU

5 To give a few examples from titles of articles and books: Banschoff and Smith (1999) speak of “Legitimacy and the European Union: The Contested Polity”; Walkers discusses (2005) “Europe’s Constitutional Momentum and the Search for Polity Legitimacy“ and Bellamy and Castiglione (2003) scrutinise “Legitimising the Euro-polity and its regime: the normative turn in EU studies.” A second feature of parts of the normative turn is here evident: the frequent use of the term – as a verb - ‘legitimising’ – especially in titles (cf. also Lord/ Beetham (2001) “Legitimizing the EU”; Lord (2003) “Legitimising a contested polity”. While it is, mostly, clear what the object of such legitimising should be (the EU), it is less so who the ‘legitimators’ are/ should be and by which ways they might *effectively* proceed. Cf. on these unresolved issues Barker (2001).

quite diverse and often different conceptions of political order are at work, even if they are not explicated. This creates the difficulty that simply too much can be meant with the polity claim. Nevertheless, the features of some basically different polity understanding can be identified: it is far from clear what are the components of the concept polity: what is meant when speaking of a polity.⁶ Differently put, it is far from obvious which c with the 'polity claim.' . A first distinction is refers to those that take the polity to center around a notion of authority. Here, we see two distinct conceptions: Taking up the distinction between familiarity and novelty, one can distinguish the view of the polity as a political system,⁷ and the polity as a novel system of governance. A different conception of the term polity is also used: this focuses on the necessity of 'socio-cultural' underpinnings.

The different conceptions can, broadly, be related either to a liberal-statist tradition of the political thought or to a what goes today under labels such as Republican or Communitarianism one. If such connections are valid, then it is not surprising that the issues of 'identity', or, more generally put: of socio-cultural underpinnings do hardly feature in accounts that are committed to a liberal political theory. The precise relating of polity conception to a tradition in European political thought is here not important; rather, it should be another indication that also models that are primarily used to construct the EU for the purpose of analysis are deeply embedded in underlying normative assumptions.

II Common action in view of problematic situations

In this second step of the paper, I sketch out a 'lean' conceptualization of the concept polity , one that is centered on the idea of arrangements to address common problems. A useful starting point for this reconstruction might be the common distinctions that are used when speaking about the European polity. A very widely practiced way of thinking about the political is to set up binary oppositions. We have seen such an opposition in the two major conceptions of the polity discussed above: on the one hand the polity as an institution of political authority, on the other hand as a community of communication. Speaking with reference to broad traditions in political thought, a *Hobbesian* tradition is thus juxtaposed to a broadly *Aristotelian* one. These traditions can either be

6 The openness of the term sometimes has strange results. Thus, one reads of the notion of 'a domestic polity – juxtaposed to the other option of an International organization' and a 'new system of governance. Yet a domestic polity might be tautological; polities *are* 'domestic'; it is not meaningful to speak of an international polity.

7 A political system, however, is – in the Eastonian tradition – always part of a wider social system, usually called society and empirically identified with (or: within) existing nation-state. It is far from clear, however, whether one might justifiably speak (yet) of a European society.

seen in having inaugurated two opposing and irreconcilable ways of conceiving ‘things political’. Others, in contrast, assert that such thinking is inevitably marked by a duality: politics here is always both about enforcement, coercion and power as well as about communication, deliberation and legitimacy (Wittrock 1999). These distinctions also strongly import on the discussions in EU studies: the opposition between ‘efficiency and democracy’ between ‘output and input’ have already been alluded to above.

Such dualistic thinking is deeply anchored in the social and human sciences. It is, however, ‘in competition’ with traditions that emphasize tripartite distinctions. Thus, the differentiation of the ways of acting on the human world as to ‘the sword, the plough and the book’, or, less figuratively, authoritative, economic and cultural practices is very widely used (Wagner 1994; cf. also Arnason 2001). The same is the case for ‘things political’. Here, the most common distinction within ‘political science’ is the one between ‘polity, politics and policy.’ In more abstract terms, the history of political thoughts is said to be concerned with: (1) the constitution of human communities with a common moral-political order; (2) the institutionalization of the creation and of the enforcement of common rules; (3) the kind of domains which should be subject to such common rules and the conceptions as which substance these rules should have.⁸

Now, the two conceptions of the polity that have dominated the debates on the European Union over the last fifteen years clearly refer to the issue (1) and (2). Either the question of the ‘socio-cultural underpinnings of the polity’, discussed as the question of ‘polity-legitimacy’, or, more broadly, a European identity is the focus of the attention; or the question of viable and desirable institutions (cf. Bellamy and Castiglione 2003), discussed as the question of ‘regime’ is the key concern. Thereby, the former is associated with a ‘communitarian’, or ‘cultural-linguistic’ conceptions of the polity, while the latter with a liberal(-democratic) conception of the polity. In some approaches, these different concerns of both traditions are jointly addressed (Bellamy and Castiglione 2003). However, also in these discussions on the EU we often see that a third dimension is added, under notions such as ‘performative legitimacy’, ‘output legitimacy’, ‘substantive legitimacy’ (Walker 2005). It is asserted that the EU needs to *address the challenges* that it faces, or, in more popular language, that the EU needs to address those issue that really ‘concern’ its citizens (, instead of, allegedly, being over concerned by issue of institutional and/ or Constitutional design which remain remote for most Europeans). In similar vain, it is at times claimed that European

⁸ In yet another way of presenting ‘the issue’, the key question of political sociology is the (re-)thinking of the questions of the coherence between ‘social identities’, ‘the extensions of authoritative rules’ and ‘social practices’.

Union and discussions surrounding it should be concerned most about *common political problems*.

This focus on common political problems, however, is not just a key idea, even if conceptualized differently, in those approaches that analyze the workings of the EU as system, but also in those that are – still – more concerned about the emergence. Most generally, the concept of 'functions' – and related 'functional pressures' that is a key stone in neo-functionalism also takes such external forces and conditions to be of central importance when explaining integration, even if the 'functions' are given a different ontological status. Across different theoretical schools, the idea of problems, functions and problem-solving thus seems to be central.

If, now, European integration occurs in a specific context in which choice is taken to put things in common, then an understanding of the European Union polity might start from this very point: *the problems* identified in a specific historical context and the choice to address them in common. Thus, the focus, or at least the initial point of departure lies less in the form that institutions take or on socio-cultural substrates, but on *problematic situations*. Accepted as a valid starting point, the following re-conceptualisation can then be proposed:

The European polity is a configuration of agreements between European political actors to act in common in view of problematic situations.

It is a *configuration* of agreements as there are a number of problems that are faced by Europeans at any point in time. The agreements, or lack thereof, to put things in common in the face of one specific such problem can be *independent* from another one. Each problem and its way of being identified and addressed should thus be analyzed separately. Only afterwards should the question of the overall coherence of the configuration addressed. By this dismembering of the polity, many pitfalls that come with a holistic conception of the polity – as mostly implicit in either of the two dominant conception of the polity – can be avoided. We will return toward this questions towards the end.

It is a configuration of *agreements* in so far a European Integration and the construction of an EU polity proceeds by peaceful means – in stark contrast to almost all other cases of polity construction, be they war, revolution, conquest or domination. To speak of *agreements* thus pays attention to conscious and willing political actors, in other words: polity constructors, who agree upon the need for putting things in common. The importance of human being who found these

agreements is, in our approach, taken for granted. Agreements do not come about 'by themselves'. However, as our approach does take at its starting point these agreements to act in common, we will not – as in probably the majority of approaches in studying European integration - depart from the 'interests' of individual actors. This move away from 'actors' as the starting point of analysis is thus both a conceptual and methodological choice – a choice which, nevertheless, is far from denying the importance of *interpreting, discussing, deciding and agreeing* human beings.

This decision to act in common is taken *in view of problematic situations*. Even though the precise perspective of the political constructors might differ, it is necessary that these perspectives still *meet* in the identification of *one* problematic situation that is that they have a common reference point. Thus, shared problem identification is necessary as well as some agreement on how this problem might be best addressed.

After this brief outline, some implications of such an approach for studying European integration will be spelled out in the following.

The focus on **problematic situations** can be related to what is in other theoretical perspective referred to a external conditions, exogenous shocks, functional pressures, functional necessities or structures. These might be then spoken of in substantial terms as 'globalisation' or 'end of the cold war', 'geo-political pressures.' Often, they are then subsumed as 'material factors'. I follow the reasoning that these situations are not open to the choice of the European political actors (even if they might have been brought about through previous actions by them), but that they happen to them, that they are 'facing' these problematic situations. In short, conditions are taken seriously in this approach advanced here. However, this perspective strongly departs from more other dominant approach in the social and in particular political science – and also integration studies – by not attributing these conditions are force, in particular of causal nature, force by themselves. Instead, as will be emphasized further above, they do depend on interpretation.

At this point, a different implication from such an emphasis on problematic situations shall be highlighted, which relate to the enterprise of the development of a general theory of integration. First, this makes it difficult to build from the observation of European integration a general theory of regional integration, as the historical conditions of, or simply put: the history of other regions in the world is a very different one. Second, the attention to such discreet problematic situations makes it difficult to conceive of *one* process which is marked by one logic and is teleological in character.

Rather, each agreement to put things in common is – most literally – contingent on the situation.

Second, there is an emphasis on both **interpretation and decision**. The attention to decision-making has been for long in the center of accounts of European political integration. However, the conception of decision-making has been a rather restrained one. As alluded to above, it has often been postulated that the respective choices for or against Europe in a particular situation have been determined by the interest of the actors, which could be derived from the situation. Taking human agency seriously would grant much more indeterminacy to the choices of the actors, not the least because these depend on their evaluation of the situation. Such evaluation – or interpretation – is, by definition, open. It is open and therefore also contestable and contested. This insight is important, as it brings us away from associating the 'problems' and their common address (commonly referred to a 'problem solving', often 'effective problem solving') with the idea that the nature of the problem is already 'objectively' given (or could be identified objectively by experts), with the overtones of technocracy that it entails. Rather, problem identification and specifications are immanently political activities.

Thus, active *evaluations* become a key pillar in our perspective. Evaluation take place through language; actors use what can be called 'ideational resources' in the interpretation of the situations. Indeed, interpretation and evaluation take place in three forms when agreements to deal with things in common are constructed: first, the interpretation of an issue to be in need of common *European* address (, thus, there are no 'given' European issues). Such common address can be conceptualized with regard to the extensions that a common rule takes; or, differently put, the extension of the practices that are concerned/ envisaged by this rule. Such a conception brings us close to the conceptual apparatus of boundaries: boundary construction and boundary removal. The choices for Europe presuppose thus that an issue is identified as a common European one. Crucially, there most exist the principled believe on the side of the actors that dealing with things in common on a European scale is both in principle possible and also potentially desirable.⁹

Second, there needs to be agreement in the interpretation of a problematic situation as a *particular*

9 The perception of the urgency to put things in common, or even, they – however crude – calculation whether the problem solving potential of putting things in common is worth the rise in new problems (or indeed: the deconstructions of established solutions to crucial questions, most prominently the social question and the question of the inclusion of the people in the government in the form of welfare state policies and liberal democracy) can – and as we have seen does – differ strongly. Finally, some people might not envisage in principle to put things in common and that it should be Europeans (and not longer British, Portuges or Danes) that deal with things in common.

problem. Thus, the issues at stake can be conceived of in terms of 'security' or 'prosperity', of 'democracy' or of 'diversity.' These concepts through which a situation is identified are treated in the analysis 'symmetrically', whereby the juxtaposition between interest and ideas, or respective theory of actions, is avoided. Third, there is the question on the agreement of a particular solution to this thus identified problem. This relates to the classical question of policy analysis, namely the outcome of 'policy-making.' However, here the means' that are agreed upon to address a specific problem are again depend on both conceptions at hand to the actors as well as to their active interpretation which means might fit best.

The upshot of the consequences of such a perspective that takes not only ideas and language but also their active and creative use seriously for studying European integration thus become that a deterministic account of integration becomes impossible, and thus also one which works with strong assumptions of causality, or even the idea of 'prediction.' More specifically, the separation of 'ideas' as a 'causal factor' from other more factors, for which labels as 'institutional' or 'structural' are common and which are sometimes opposed to 'ideas' with terms such as 'material' or simply 'given interests' loses its validity as there are for the decisions and actions of the actors there are no 'given interests' or 'material factors' as such; rather, the motivations for actions are always a product of the perception and interpretation of the situation at stake through the lens of available ideational resources.

Finally, the open formulation '*arrangements for dealing with things in common*' allows for various ways in which the common rules are formed and implemented. These can tend more towards traditional modes of government as well as towards what is conceived of as governance. These modes can bring together diverse sets of actors, thereby, again, eschewing the strict categorizations between primarily 'supranational' and primarily 'intergovernmental' modes of decision making.

III European transformations in time and space

Yet, with such a conceptualization, namely on of focusing on *discreet* problematic situations and agreements to act in common in view of these situations, an important original question might get lost, namely of conceiving of the nature of the EU (or: the outcome of European integration) in terms of broad (some might say fundamental) changes in political order. Thereby, what has been reproached to many policies studies – to focus on details while thereby taking assumptions on the whole which can not so easily taken for granted might be true for this approach too. To avoid this,

we shall return to this question, namely the one of situating the EU in space and time and taking the question of change seriously again.

The question of the 'nature' of the EU can be approached in basically two different ways. One might either ask to what 'kind' it belongs. Section I of this paper dealt with some attempts to proceed on this way, in particular with those that use the polity concept to capture the 'kind' of the EU. I drew attention to the difficulties, and importantly here the ambiguities, that are entailed in this polity turn. My own attempt in Section II to provide a sufficiently open yet at the same time more accentuated conception of the EU as a polity was a response to these difficulties. On the other hand one might in the quest for the 'nature of the EU' as a political entity put the focus on any specificity. Such specificity would become apparent through comparison of the EU to other political entities. This could be a comparison over space or over time. In other words, our understanding of the EU would be increased by situating the EU in space and time and thereby drawing attention to the historicity of the phenomena. This final section will serve to offer some elements of the form that such a situating of the EU in space and time will take, building on the conception of the EU as a configuration of agreements to collectively address problematic situations.

A concern for historicity, or more broadly, human made *change* of the human world, has been present in many contributions to the study of the EU. The guiding concern – in both analytical and normative terms – of the founding theory of European integration, neo-functionalism, was the foundational process from a European order of nation-states to one in which these would be 'dissolved' in a European polity. The self-acclaimed revisionism of 'liberal intergovernmentalism' essentially lies in questioning such a transformation by affirming that political order in Europe will remain one of discreet nation-states. Such dichotomies projected over time are not unique to what has been stylized for a long time as the grand debate of 'integration theory.' Plenty of conceptual attempts to capture the nature of the EU also reveal such dichotomous understandings. Most prominent of these are that the EU is post-national, post-statal or post-modern polity. Mirroring these claims of post-ness while working with the same temporal oppositions are normative contributions that do argue for a European version of the nation-state, which is sovereign, and not a post-sovereign polity. Finally, the opposition between 'supranationalism' and 'intergovernmentalism', if taken seriously as a conceptual distinction, is also impregnated with this binary thinking.

While such dichotomous conceptions might be of use for the sharpening of different 'visions' in order to make range of political choices apparent, they are less so for a historical understanding of

the EU. The suggestion of a temporal either-or works with overly coherent and unified image of what the EU might possibly go beyond, namely 'the nation-state', sometimes qualified by the notions 'modern' or 'European'. It is thereby implied that this 'nation-state' is a phenomenon that has been stretching over large periods of time while still remaining 'essentially' the same, that is while its defining characteristics have remained constant. Otherwise, a designation of an epoch that could be 'gone beyond' would not be meaningful. Such a vision is, while offering quick and ready-to-use theoretical hunches, is problematic, to say the least. A wide diversity of political practices over the last 350 or 200 years (whatever the temporal specification that is given for 'the nation-state', if one is given at all) is subsumed under one image. In other words, and even if this language has been overused recently, the 'nation-state' becomes here re-eified.

Instead of thinking of the nation-state as an entity, some authors propose a more process orientated narration in which they place – obviously towards 'its end' or 'more recent' phase – 'European integration.' Here, the 'nation-state' is analyzed as a set of consecutive developments, all of which function through the mechanisms of boundary destruction, construction and internal structuring of the respectively created spaces. Thus, Stefano Bartolini speaks of the five distinct developments of 'state-building', 'capitalist development', 'nation-building', 'democratization', and 'social sharing'. This perspective has the merit of that showing that the political history of Europe over the last four hundred years or so different questions (or: problématiques) were at stake, answers to which were institutionalized over long stretches over time. More specifically, but of fundamental importance, is that his perspective reminds us that any account of political developments needs to take the concept of boundaries and respective practices of boundary building at its core. What is more questionable, however, is the developmental perspective that is still marks this account. Speaking of stages, it appears as if the different developments have been 'building up' on another in a progressive sense so that the end of the process was reached with the liberal democratic nation-state with extensive welfare policies as it could be seen in much of Western Europe at around 1960s. This 'highest stage' is then quickly, again, equaled with 'the-nation-state-as-we-know-it', and also taken as standard for present normative evaluations.

Two points can be drawn from this: first, instead of thinking in terms of ruptures, a conception of *transformations* seems more adequate. The task then is to specificity what it is that is transformed. Here, two different time frames can be employed: first, what is transformed are indeed those liberal-democratic nation-states with intensive welfare policies. However, it must be recognized that they are fairly recent phenomena, namely of those thirty years after the World War II. Yet, and this is the

second step, they can be seen as an institutionalized compromise of different questions that had been present in European history over much longer spans of time, as Bartolini rightly shows. Yet, instead of creating an account in which one functional achievement builds upon another, different historical epochs can then be analysed as with regard to the different arrangement – or compromises – for addressing these questions.

Here we can return to our conception of the EU as a configuration of agreements to address in common problematic situations. It has been proposed that 'substantial' problems and the way they are addressed are the essential feature of the European Union. Central for European integration is that such political problems are identified as being of European extensions and therefore the rules to address them are made to take on European dimension. It is this spatial dimension that justifies to take the concept of Europeanization center-stage, whereby it comes close to its host-concept nationalization and globalisation, both being inherently spatial as temporal.

Taking such practices of dealing with problematic situations of European extensions as a starting point for speaking about transformations, change can then be discussed along three further basic dimensions: first, which issues are – still and anew – identified as being of address and what kind of solutions are imaginable and applied? Second, which changes can be observed as to the institutional arrangements by which these common rules arrived at and implemented, what is discussed under the notions of governance, authority and efficiency? Third, what kind of changes can be observed as to the identification of those whose are affected by those rules with the – European – political institutions, commonly discussed under terms such as demos, legitimacy, identity? The question of the degree of change can then be addressed for each of these dimensions.

This would be a perspective that put the emphasis on change, and thus has a similar concern as the original theories of integration, albeit the the question of change is addresses in more nuance than simply in terms of the 'transfer' of sovereignty; or lifting policies issues (or even identities) simply from one 'level' to 'another.' What does this entail for the question on the nature of the polity? In such a conception, the question of the novelty of the EU as a polity can not be answered with respect to one dimension only. In particular, an judgment on the question of novelty would no solely be couched in terms of 'sovereignty'. Rather, the different dimension have to be taken into consideration – and it will then be a matter of judgment whether this constellation is novel indeed.

Conclusion

One suggestion, arrived at the end of this paper, was that we might shift our focus from the question of the nature of the EU to the questions of the quality and extent of the transformations in political orders and practices. It would entail a return (or rather re-valuing) of a, if not the central concern of 'early integration studies' while avoiding the pitfalls of both its teleological and functionalist orientations. Specifically, instead of unhelpfully juxtaposing 'the nation-state' and 'the European polity' (and respective images of 'levels'), one would pay attention to broader changes in things political of which the European Union is only one, albeit central, part. It would also allow to avoid to conceive of (and evaluate) change along one criterion only (sovereignty, or hierarchy, or democracy) and be aware of the multi dimension of the change.

Europeanization seems an apt turn to designate the object of study. Finally, such an awareness that – to resort to a often evoked yet still valid claim – that change (particularly over the last 500 years or so - has been a permanent feature in the history of Europe might take the pressure of us to diagnose and name 'fundamental' and 'epochal'. Assertions as 'post-national', 'post-modern', 'post-national' just as 'Neo-medieval' and 'Empire' would then have to be resorted to less frequently. This might, finally, also lead to more nuanced normative assessments.

Second, however, such a focus on transformations alone might not be satisfactory. Arguably, most, if not all political thought was concerned with issues of boundedness and – however loosely conceived – unity: the exercise of authority is bounded, communities are. Now, Europeanization (or in older language: European integration) is understood to be a political process. Therefore, some ways of speaking about the political space that is created through Europeanization and that is institutionalized in the European Union might be necessary. In default of other concepts, the one of the 'polity' might indeed be the most useful one. To resort to this concept, should, however, be done consciously and deliberately, as the polity turn carries with it normative implications. Moreover, further work as to re-conceptualizing the concept polity when used in the current situation might be necessary.

Some steps, third, in this direction were taken in the central part of the paper, where the EU polity was conceived of as configuration of agreements to address in common problematic situations. While being admittedly broad, it has the advantage of putting the focus on the substantive activities (or, in time-honored language: functions) that – literally – constitute the European Union. The study

of the emergence of these agreements can resort to some of the key themes – both recent as time-honored - of the wider social science when studying things political, such as historicity and situativeness, pragmatic and creative agency as well as and language and interpretation. A remainder of the broad issues might be helpful as the transformation in political order and the question of the nature of the European polity will stay with us. Addressing them will be indeed a matter of both interpretation and political judgment.