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‘Theorising “EU Deepening and Widening”: A Return to Grand Theory?’

**“Towards a theoretical link between EU widening and deepening”**

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*Draft not for quotation*

*Comments welcome!*

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## “Towards a theoretical link between EU widening and deepening”

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### ***Abstract***

Following the focus of the 2009 EUSA conference EU-CONSENT panel on ‘*Theorising “EU Deepening and Widening”: A Return to Grand Theory?*’ this paper presents main aspects and outcomes of the theoretical work of the Network of Excellence EU-CONSENT over the past four years. The paper presents a set of multi-disciplinary ideas and assumptions about interrelated causes and effects of EU widening and deepening. It discusses and reflects on how to merge these assumptions and the approaches of different academic disciplines into a more integrated structure to further guide and conceptualise research. It elaborates on assumptions developed as common points of reference and proposes ideas for a theoretical link between EU deepening and widening. By doing so, the paper seeks to contribute to bridging a gap in European integration theory: Despite the seeming interconnectedness of current developments in EU deepening and widening, the relevant knowledge to explain and evaluate this claim from an academic point of view still remains a desideratum. In how far such a link can be established is subject to discussion of the present paper.

### ***Contents***

1. Introduction: The underlying puzzle .....	3
2. Initial definitions of EU deepening and widening .....	4
3. Conceptual challenges of EU deepening and widening .....	6
4. Empirical observations on EU deepening and widening .....	8
5. Patterns of EU deepening and widening .....	10
6. Potential scope of theoretically embedding EU deepening and widening .....	13
7. Scenarios to theoretically link EU deepening and widening.....	15
8. Conclusions: Desiderata for a theoretical link between EU widening and deepening.....	18

## **1. Introduction: The underlying puzzle**

Judging by the number of recent textbooks, theorising European integration is alive and well. This undoubtedly has to do with the somewhat surprising persistence and success of what since the Maastricht Treaty is known as the European Union. Indeed, the question underlying all such efforts remains a fascinating puzzle: How can we explain the in many ways astonishing “growth” of a new and “strange” system from an initial Community of Six with a narrow scope of “coal and steel” into a quasi-constitutional polity with a membership of 27 covering nearly all areas of public policies – equipped with a somewhat “state-like agenda”? Over the decades, the traditional “big three” approaches to answering this puzzle (Neo-Functionalism, Intergovernmentalism and Federalism) have been empirically and theoretically refined and amended to the purpose at hand. Newer approaches, such as Constructivism, Europeanisation and Multi-Level Governance have joined the theoretical canon and now serve to explain a broad range of phenomena. European Union studies have departed from their niche in International Relations scholarship and the EU as a political system has become an important object of analyses in comparative politics.

At the same time, despite the growing sophistication of theoretical approaches, the two central dynamics driving the process of European integration continue to be regarded as things apart: “deepening”, understood broadly as vertical integration (i.e. a transfer of competences and shift of decision-making power to the European level), and “widening”, understood broadly as horizontal integration (i.e. enlargement) have been treated as two separate processes that each require theorising of their own. Theories of “EU deepening” have tended to view the question of who actually is an EU member, and why, as more or less historically contingent. On the other hand, theories of “EU widening” have tended to focus on the question of under what circumstances enlargement occurs and what impact it has on the functioning of the EU’s polity. However, the question of the mutual relationship and possible interdependence between EU deepening and widening remains a “missing link” in integration theory.

Four years ago, the Network of Excellence EU-CONSENT set out to address the question of “wider Europe, deeper integration?” in a number of thematic work packages, focussing on EU deepening and widening in a number of policy fields, such as economic, social or foreign policy. This paper takes up research results produced within EU-CONSENT from 2005 to

2009<sup>1</sup> in an effort to provide a conceptual framework and some preliminary answers to the challenge of integrating EU deepening and widening into one framework of analysis. With this approach, the paper seeks to explore the potential for systematic theorising on EU deepening and widening and to develop a pluralistic debate on common points of reference.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: the next two sections provide an overview of EU-CONSENT's initial approach to the question at hand and its definitions of the central concepts. The following two sections outline empirical observations on EU deepening and widening and present observed patterns. Another two sections treat possible theoretical approaches to the interrelation between EU deepening and widening and resulting scenarios. A final section concludes.

## **2. Initial definitions of EU deepening and widening**

EU-CONSENT is a Network of Excellence funded by the EU's 6<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme with more than 50 institutional partners including 25 universities and more than 150 senior and 100 young researchers from different disciplines such as political science, economics, law, history, or sociology. As common research focus, network members identified the two key analytical concepts of EU deepening and widening, their interrelation as well as their impact on European integration in order to analyse the past and to elaborate an innovative framework for future European integration.

At its very beginning, the network highlighted the following elements as being of major relevance for joint research on EU deepening and widening:

*“In the decades long process of constructing Europe via five waves of accession as well as seven treaty revisions and amendments, the year 2004 will document in a particular and unique way the key relationship between a wider Europe and a deeper integration: In May 2004, ten new member states will join the European Union – the biggest enlargement in terms of states and population ever since the beginning of the European integration process. Simultaneously, the European Union is preparing itself for the first time to adopt a Constitutional Treaty which was formulated by applying the new Convention method.*

*This new construction will have a major impact on every Union citizen's well being, on the democratic stability and economic performance of member states and on the*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Umbach, Gaby (comp., ed. and eval.) (2009): EU-CONSENT 2005-2009: Four Years of Research on EU “Deepening” and “Widening”: Evidence, Explanation, Extrapolation, draft EU-CONSENT Deliverable 144, Cologne.

*cohesion, effectiveness and international actorness as well as performance of the Union itself. Given the ever increasing economic and cultural diversity of the Union and their impact on a European public sphere, these processes need specific efforts of researchers and practitioners alike to explore and explain key factors for this process as well as to extrapolate past trends wherever possible, to evaluate visions for the future and elaborate approaches.”<sup>2</sup>*

Even without the Constitutional Treaty and regardless of the halt of the ratification process of its successor, the Lisbon Treaty, this core focus remained a relevant research topic throughout the network’s lifetime. At mid-term of the network, this question was as valid as at its outset. “In a 2007 speech, enlargement commissioner Olli Rehn pointed out that ‘[d]eepening and enlargement are [...] not contradictory but complementary’ and that ‘[i]t is the amalgam of the two that has made the Europe of today stronger, more powerful and more influential’<sup>3</sup>.”<sup>4</sup> And also at the end of EU-CONSENT in May 2009, with “the Treaty of Lisbon in the process of ratification, it is still too early to assess whether its reforms will signify a decisive ‘rise in the scope and the level of European integration in terms of institution-building, democratic legitimacy and European policies’<sup>5</sup>. What can nevertheless be stated is that the reform process leading to the Lisbon Treaty was motivated by and required because of the last enlargement round, confronting EU institutions with the challenge of having to cope with a total of 27 member states.”<sup>6</sup> So, in light of this interrelation of EU deepening and widening, the obvious question still is: *wider Europe – deeper integration?*

Rooting in the strong focus of European integration theories on explaining the development of the integration community through EU deepening and the “theoretical neglect”<sup>7</sup> of EU widening in this context, “the seeming interconnectedness of current developments in EU widening and deepening”<sup>8</sup> is still not sufficiently backed by theory-based links and

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<sup>2</sup> Original EU-CONSENT research proposal (2003): “Network of Excellence: Wider Europe, deeper integration? “Constructing Europe” Network, “EU-CONSENT », FP 6 call FP6-2002-Citizens-3, proposal part B, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Rehn, O. (2007): Europe’s great challenge: how to combine political deepening and gradual enlargement?, speech given at ENA, Strasbourg 20 June 2007, available online at: [<sup>4</sup> Umbach, G./Zuber, C. \(2007\): Beyond initial scenarios, Developing guiding assumptions and theses on EU deepening and widening: The mission of the Task Force Research Frame, EU-CONSENT D 106, p. 2.](http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/07/410&format=HTML&aged=0&language=FR&guiLanguage=en, 24/09/07, p. I.</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

<sup>5</sup> This definition of EU deepening was formulated by Faber, A./Wessels, W. (2006): Revisited background paper on the project’s theoretical and methodological framework including sets of expectations and yardsticks with indicators, EU-CONSENT D 6, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Umbach, G./Zuber, C. 2007:2.

<sup>7</sup> Schimmelfenning, F. / Sedelmeier, U. (2002): “Theorizing EU Enlargement: research focus, hypotheses, and the state of research”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 9(4), pp. 500-528, p. 500.

<sup>8</sup> Umbach, G./Zuber, C. 2007:2.

explanation. European integration theory, thus, still seems to “lack the relevant knowledge to explain and evaluate this claim from an academic point of view”<sup>9</sup>. So, in this context, “[s]cientific analysis of the mutual causal effects of widening and deepening is still not sufficiently advanced to provide for general academic knowledge capable of inspiring a coherent theory-based vision for the EU’s future. As often stated within EU-CONSENT, a theory of European integration where *integration* would stand for both *deepening* and *widening* as well as for their *interrelationship* is still not in sight<sup>10</sup>. This fact ... proves yet again the importance of the network’s aim to explore the potential for systematic theorising on EU deepening and widening and to develop a pluralistic debate on common points of reference (potentially) resulting in a joint ... research frame on EU deepening and widening.”<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Conceptual challenges of EU deepening and widening

Any attempt at systematically linking EU deepening and widening must respond to the necessity to first provide a definition of what exactly is meant by these terms, all the more so since it is held that the two terms lie at the very core of – or are even identical with – the process of European integration. EU-CONSENT soon found that this task is not easily met. The process at hand is complex and multi-dimensional by nature, with many developments happening simultaneously in different areas with different trajectories. Mapping out a conceptual framework that focuses on merely two dimensions thus proved to be challenging. How was this challenge met?

EU deepening was initially broadly defined as a ‘rise in scope and level of European integration in terms of institution-building, democratic legitimacy and European policies’<sup>12</sup> affecting both the EU’s polity and policies. It was, thus, understood as a process of gradual and formal “vertical institutionalisation”<sup>13</sup>. EU widening was broadly defined as a “process of gradual and formal horizontal institutionalization”<sup>14</sup> or, in neo-functionalist terms, a process

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid..

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Faber, A./Wessels, W. 2006:4f.; Miles, Lee (2004): Theoretical Considerations, in: Nugent, Neill (ed.): European Union Enlargement, Houndmills, p. 253-265, p. 264.

<sup>11</sup> Umbach, G./Zuber, C. 2007:2.

<sup>12</sup> Faber, A./Wessels, W. 2006:3.

<sup>13</sup> Schimmelfenning, F. / Sedelmeier, U. 2002:503.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.:502.

of “geographical spill-over”<sup>15</sup>, i.e. EU enlargement in terms of the accession of new member states.

Specifying and further differentiating these two analytical poles, lessons learnt from EU-CONSENT can enlighten further conceptualisation in order to build the basis for future research and also for their theoretical linkage. In terms of conceptual clarity, research results uncover certain explanatory gaps of the two poles given that both turned out not to be equally relevant for all developments and areas of European integration. Thus, in analysing the interrelation of EU deepening and widening, some sort of bias towards one of the two concepts was identified as a certain characteristic in some cases, such as economic and social policies.

So, due to the differential impact of EU deepening and widening, EU-CONSENT results have shown that, when conceptualising and analysing both, one needs to differentiate between effects and change in various dimensions and levels of integration, such as political, economic, cultural and/or behavioural ones. Such an analytical differentiation is helpful, as different areas differ also according to the pace and direction of change induced by EU deepening and widening, potentially impacting and/or hampering developments in other areas. Without recognising such a distinction between fields, procedures, and areas of European integration in which EU deepening and widening could impact, generalisable observations on the interrelation of deepening and widening and their impact on European integration are difficult to be made.

Furthermore, the analysis (of the interrelation) of EU deepening and widening needs to draw attention not only to formal developments in European integration. Especially during the difficult ratification period of the Lisbon Treaty, in which no agreement on further formal EU deepening was found so far, elements of informal deepening on the level of the EU’s day-to-day practice became increasingly relevant for the functioning and understanding of the enlarged EU. So, in terms of conceptual challenges, formal and informal dimensions of EU deepening and widening need to be taken into account to draw a broader picture of their effects on the development of the EU.

Additionally, when conceptualising EU deepening and widening, further attention needs to be paid to aspects of “broadening” that are inherent in both concepts. As outlined above, EU deepening and widening are difficultly defined for a particular set of activities and

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<sup>15</sup> Faber, A./Wessels, W. 2006:3.

competences. As especially EU-CONSENT members working on the internal market and on economic policies underlined, the increase in EU level activities for instance does not necessarily imply further EU deepening *per se* given that such an increase could also well result in a ‘mere’ extension or widening of scope of activities that could or could not be deeper than the existing integration depth. As such an extension of the scope of policy approaches can be witnessed in a variety of areas and dimensions of European integration (e.g. with the open method of co-ordination/OMC), the additional and new concept of “broadening” needs to be integrated into a more comprehensive and coherent conceptual frame in order not to confuse an extension or widening of scope with the initial and common definition of EU widening as “geographical spill-over”, i.e. enlargement.

Since this phenomenon of the extension of scope of policies is neither EU deepening nor widening, this new element is understood as a separate concept as it is inherent in and affects both deepening (leading to an extension of scope of policies without further deepening integration) and widening (through the integration of new instruments to complement EU foreign policy and to serve as alternatives for formal widening, i.e. EU accession).

With this particular conceptualisation of EU deepening, widening and broadening, research on European integration is thus equipped with a conceptual framework that permits to focus on the two „master processes“ of deepening and widening, while taking account of subtler processes (such as broadening) that are not sufficiently captured by these broad concepts.

#### **4. Empirical observations on EU deepening and widening**

In their empirical analyses, EU-CONSENT members come to the conclusion that the processes of EU deepening and widening (as well as broadening) are interlinked and in constant development with no regular strength, intensity or direction. Although smaller or bigger ‘bangs’ can be witnessed, this development takes place in an incremental and path-dependent way, leading to step-by-step progress. In different intensity, both processes affect all fields of European integration. In addition, if the perspective is broadened beyond the Brussels institutions, it is important to recognise that different countries are affected and react to widening and deepening in different ways. While this point may appear self-evident, it nonetheless demonstrates that integration is not a functionally, temporally and geographically linear process. So, even within one dimension of change the analysis of the impact of widening on deepening is complex. However, a certain degree of correlation between them

can be confirmed as changes resulting from deepening processes to some extent influence the widening process, and vice versa, as inter alia in the case of the evolution of European foreign policy or concerning social movements.

Some EU-CONSENT results support the assessment that nearly all policy areas are affected by EU deepening and widening. In nearly all fields, enlargement inter alia strengthens disparities, which must be controlled and dealt with by an effort to strengthen institutions and enhance solidarity between actors. The key challenge here is to realise and react to this reality. According to EU-CONSENT results, the most affected areas by the process of deepening are monetary policy, competition policy and external development policy. Concerning the process of widening, the most affected areas are CFSP, environmental policy (with East European countries polluting more), and labour market policies (due to the diversities between the newcomers and the old EU member states).

Research on EU widening (particularly on the fifth enlargement round) revealed that enlargement, in general terms, has brought about an evident impact on both old and new member states. It has generated new pressures for the reform of institutional structures and the need for more efficient implementation of EU policies. In this assessment, EU widening puts adaptational pressures on the EU institutions and bodies. The consequences of this process, leading to transformation, adaptation or mere assimilation, mirror the degree of the enlargement wave's pressures on the EU system, that – through increased difficulty of decision-taking in a situation of increasingly diversified interests – could also hamper further deepening.

Further to the mutual interrelation of deepening and widening, research revealed two distinct directions of impact: (1) areas, in which deepening impacted on widening. The halt in ratification of the Lisbon Treaty for instance can be assumed to have a direct effect on the (im)possibility of further widening; (2) areas in which EU widening impacts on deepening, such as the development of the European Commission, for which widening can be assessed to be more decisive for the understanding the functioning of the 'enlarged' Commission than deepening.

## 5. Patterns of EU deepening and widening

Although much research on European integration is restricted to short-term processes and restricted by short-term periods of analysis, empirical analyses within EU-CONSENT searched for recurring patterns of EU deepening and widening. Such a conceptualisation of the interrelation EU deepening and widening also helps to further differentiate theoretical links between the two concepts and to formulate more general desiderata for their theoretical treatment (cf. below).

### *Continuity*

Continuity of both processes is a central pattern of the interrelation of EU deepening and widening. This trend mirrors the fact that despite some inevitable gaps in the integration process, the EU follows a course which is not always straight, but which has so far been characterised by gradual and simultaneous EU widening and deepening. So, both processes can be assessed to be ongoing, path-dependent and incremental in an emerging, complex and open supranational political system. Constant evolution and flux are key characteristics of this system. Yet, as already mentioned, no regular strength, intensity, and direction can be readily identified, although both processes are accompanied by a continuous process of constitutionalisation. As a consequence, both EU deepening and widening also lead to a continuous readjustment at the EU's internal level, leading to systemic self-regulation under the impact of enlargement or to a limitation of disintegration in the worst case. Research on the external relations of the EU as well as on ESDP exemplifies this continuity trend (i.e. a rather linear, continuous and logical process in development). Also, research on the development of interest groups shows them to be influenced mostly by continuous patterns of EU deepening and widening.

### *Cyclical relation*

Cyclical patterns between the two processes represent a second trend. Such patterns have been identified by EU-CONSENT historians observing that EU widening was a pre-condition for EU deepening (and not vice-versa) in some cases, such as in the case of overcoming the French veto against British membership in 1969<sup>16</sup> that resulted in an agreement on the *acquis*

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<sup>16</sup> Ludlow, N. P. (2006): *The European Community and the Crises of the 1960s*. London / New York: Routledge.

*communautaire* in the first enlargement negotiations. This milestone of integration is viewed to have prevented disintegration as consequence of EU widening.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the 2004/07 enlargement is generally regarded as a driving force for institutional reforms after 2000<sup>18</sup>.

Cyclical relations can also be identified in the field of foreign policy in relation to internal and external policy developments, in which informal integration steps are followed by formal ones concerning for instance the development of strategic capabilities and means of foreign policy. Also in European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) cycles of EU deepening coinciding with EU widening can be found. Such cycles of EU deepening responded to perceived external threats that were not properly handled by EU institutions. Additionally, also cycles of regionalisation can be identified. They are, yet, not time-related, but rather influenced by security-related events, thus linked to reactions to internal and external events. Also in view of economic and social policies incremental enlargement exerts a recurrent influence on the development of policies such as cohesion, but is not viewed to be limited to “geographical spill-over” in the above sense. In the process of Euro area enlargement, for example, two different trends can be observed: first, Euro area widening (increasing number of member states) and, second, Euro area deepening (need for a coherent management of the economic policy system instigating further deepening of governance mechanisms). In this context, the progressive consolidation of economic governance can be assessed as a form of EU deepening occurring for pragmatic reasons rather than as a result of a transformation of supranational institutional logics.

#### *Reaction to EU internal/external developments and crises*

Reaction to EU internal developments builds another pattern of the interrelation of EU deepening and widening. In such cases, both processes continue as results of certain dynamics already going on within the political system rather than as responses to a clear and well-designed intention to deepen or widen the system. ESDP provides an example for this pattern as does the French empty chair policy during the late 1960s.

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Rasmussen, M. (2007): State power and the *acquis communautaire* in the European Community of the early 1970s, in: van der Harst, J. (ed.): *Beyond the Customs Union: The European Community's Quest for Deepening, Widening and Completion, 1969-1975*. Brussels: Bruylant, pp. 359-375.

<sup>18</sup> Loth, W. (2006): *Europa im Rückblick*, in: *Jahrbuch der Europäischen Integration 2005*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, pp. 45-54.

Additionally, both EU deepening and widening as well as their interrelation also developed further as a reaction to external crisis. In this perspective, the collapse of the bipolar world in 1989 had a strong influence on the EU with the 2004/07 enlargement representing a profound turning point in European integration as a result of the interplay of EU widening and deepening with 'external' factors. The same holds true for the responses to the 2008 financial and economic as well as energy crises that, due to tremendous political pressures and by creating certain unalterable constraints, forced political actors within the EU to find common solutions that might however represent lasting steps of EU deepening and broadening. Prominent examples in this respect are the development of the Euro group or the supranational management of financial and economic instability through policy co-ordination. Furthermore, global challenges such as climate change or the need for sustainable (economic) growth influence the further broadening and potentially also deepening of European integration. In this reaction-to-external-crisis-perspective, the global debate on climate change influenced both EU deepening and widening in terms of an expanding EU acquis prolonging the adaptation and preparation phase of candidate countries for instance. Finally, also the development of ESDP has been strongly influenced by a changing international environment and by responses to perceived external threats.

#### *No recurring patterns*

Contrary to these patterns, some EU-CONSENT results hint at no particular recurring patterns or teleology, but rather at a multifaceted impact in different fields of European integration. So, in view of EU deepening and broadening, the internal market, for instance, has depended on the issue or the moment in time rather than on certain logics or patterns of interrelation of EU deepening and widening. Also in Justice and Home Affairs or in the areas of human rights and post-conflict reconstruction no recurring patterns have been identified.

This insight should serve as a caveat to theoretical conceptualisation. For a system in constant evolution and flux, stable or recurring patterns are either difficult to find or could be constantly increasing in number due to the changing nature of the EU itself. Moreover, the endeavour of conceptualisation could strongly be hampered by a situation in which positive feedback loops seem to have reached their limits. The present may be such a situation, in which the interrelation between deepening and widening seems to have stopped working, resulting in an apparent stalemate created by the difficulties surrounding the ratification of the

Lisbon Treaty on the one hand and a general enlargement fatigue (amplified by the debate about Turkish membership) on the other.

Social science has an inbuilt tendency to recognise patterns. Recognising non-patterns on the other hand often appears unsatisfying to the analyst.<sup>19</sup> Efforts at theoretical conceptualisation should not become victims of their own ambition and strive to take the possibility of non-patterns into account.

The empirical observation of possible recurring patterns greatly serves efforts at a theoretical conventionalisation about the relationship between EU deepening and widening. This should take into account that there are multiple possible patterns. Theorising should therefore take recourse to a broad range of available theoretical preconceptions that can serve as a creatively and dynamic ‘open’ source for further efforts.

## **6. Potential scope of theoretically embedding EU deepening and widening**

In order to establish a theoretical link between EU deepening and widening various theories and approaches can be useful. Different disciplines apply a broad range of theories and approaches to their research on European integration, sometimes going beyond disciplinary borders in ‘mixing’ and ‘welding’ perspectives in a creatively and dynamic ‘open’ way to create useful explanatory instruments. This approach, also applied under EU-CONSENT, gives an interesting insight into the benefit of different theories for a theoretical link of EU deepening and widening.

Among the most attractive theories and approaches to link EU deepening and widening are, rather naturally, classical European integration theories, i.e. neo-functionalism, intergovernmentalism and federalism. Also in view of the analysis of EU deepening and widening as well as their interrelation, they still deliver and help to interpret European integration if applied in a sophisticated way and adapted to the subject of analysis. Yet, linking these classical theories to EU deepening and widening, in some areas, such as external policies, a more pragmatic and creatively ‘open’ approach is helpful, combining multi-disciplinary perspectives (inter alia also on the environment, immigration, culture, identities, etc.) in order to fine-tune the explanatory device of analysis. Such an approach could, for instance, result in an ‘open’ mixture of neo-functionalism, neo-institutionalism and rational

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. King, G. /Keohane, R. O./Verba, S. (1994): *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, Princeton/New Jersey.

choice approaches to explain the impact of EU deepening and widening on institutionalisation within the EU.

(Neo-)Institutionalist approaches support the analysis of processes of informal and formal EU deepening and widening as well as the explanation of continuity and change in European integration. So, applying them to EU deepening and widening helps to understand the development of the EU through step-by-step evolution, critical moments or unintended consequences. Especially research on the EU's institutional development and its constitutionalisation, economic integration or the EU's democratic life can very fruitfully apply the different strands of (neo-)institutionalism. Moreover, as regards constitutionalisation, a link with legal approaches and ideas, such as the unity thesis, fundamental principles, legal pluralism, critical legal studies or legal realism support the analysis.

Furthermore, political system building approaches<sup>20</sup> help to establish a link to the current theoretical debates about whether EU deepening has come to a halt after the 2004/07 widening, whether the EU reached an (however stable) equilibrium<sup>21</sup> or, whether EU widening led to more differentiated forms of deepening in the sense of broadening.

A link of EU deepening and widening as well as Europeanisation and (multilevel) governance approaches is useful to examine *inter alia* the impact of EU membership on the domestic political systems of new member states as well as the feedback effects of domestic change on future EU deepening and widening. Moreover, such a link (in some cases also combined with constructivist assumptions) can guide the analysis of European foreign policy, democracy and legitimacy, regionalisation, EMU or EU constitutionalisation.

Comparative politics and the ideas of politicisation in the EU's political system can be applied to analyse the development of political cleavages in order to also respond to questions of whether the EU has been increasingly politicised due to EU widening, whether the latter has led the EU in the opposite direction or whether political elites chose to turn to more technocratic decision-making behind closed doors in order to avoid blockades. Moreover, public policy and policy transfer approaches support the analysis of the development of democracy and legitimacy within the EU as do discourse analysis theories of democracy, resource mobilisation theory, political-process model, and sociological theory of identity.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. *inter alia* Stein Rokkan, Bartolini.

<sup>21</sup> Most prominently Moravcsik.

In view of economic analysis, fiscal federalism in its different manifestations supports the analysis of the EU budget's evolution, but is limited by the sui generis character of the supranational fiscal constitution. Furthermore, in view of analysing the impact of EU deepening and widening on economic and social policies several economic theories (such as theories of economic integration and competitiveness, institutional and neo-institutional economic theory, theories of economic regulation, theories of trade gravitation, trade creation and trade diversion, microeconomic and macroeconomic efficiency, convergence and divergence theories, neoclassical growth theory; endogenous growth theory, and theories of social capital) combined with political science theories (such as Europeanisation) can provide for theoretical devices to link EU deepening and widening in this particular area of European integration.

Furthermore, political economy does not only shed light on how the political and economic dimensions of integration interact to produce change, but also on the impact of developments in one policy area on the overall course of European integration and vice versa. It also provides for a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches that render the study of alternative models of integration, discourses, cleavages, and distribution patterns as key independent variables shaping future integration possible.

This multitude of approaches chosen by researchers within the EU-CONSENT network has highlighted the usefulness of a creatively 'open' approach if it is to grasp the complex and ongoing processes of EU deepening and widening (as well as broadening) and their interrelation with the process of European integration.

## **7. Scenarios to theoretically link EU deepening and widening**

A practical step towards actively linking EU deepening and widening through European integration theories is to develop theoretically based scenarios on the two processes. Integration theories form the basis of a set of guiding assumptions on the interrelation in order to structure research. EU-CONSENT proceeded in this way to structure the analysis of EU deepening and widening and their interrelation. Each of these assumptions rooted in different theoretical approaches that linked them to formulate expectations about the effects of EU

deepening and widening on further European integration. Based on the respective theoretical direction, they took up similar factors, but expected different outcomes.<sup>22</sup>

#### *EU deepening and widening in a neo-functionalism spill-over*

One scenario embeds EU deepening and widening in a neo-functionalism logic and states that reinforcing positive effects of both lead to further spill-over, resulting in a virtuous spiral and integration successes. So, following neo-functionalism ideas, this first assumption extrapolates a trend from the past which stresses that in general mutually reinforcing positive effects exist between EU deepening and widening. This means that EU widening strengthens the awareness of the need for institutional reform – so that the EU continues to function properly – and thus lead to a (path-dependent) process of deepening and vice-versa. The EU, while becoming bigger and wider, simultaneously reforms its institutional structures and enhances their efficiency. The democratic legitimisation is strengthened and contributes to a growing sense of common European identity – a shift of loyalties predicted by Ernst Haas. New aspects of economic, social and security policies spill-over to the European level and existing European policies further integrate and intensify. The legal output of the EU constantly grows, covering more and more policy areas and replacing national regulations. Ideally, the EU, thus, turns into a legitimised and well-balanced system of governance both on the national and on the European level while representing a unified and strengthened actor at the international level.

#### *EU deepening and widening in a negative spill-back*

Another scenario theoretically links EU deepening and widening by combining neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism assumptions. In this scenario, EU deepening and widening are understood as interconnected through reinforcing negative consequences leading to spill-back within a vicious spiral of overstrain and overstretch. In an intergovernmental logic, common policies suffer from the growing number and heterogeneity of member states and their interests, leading to stagnation and political deadlock. Institutional reforms, policy

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<sup>22</sup> Text sources of the following section: Original project proposal; Faber, A./Wessels, W. 2006; and Faber, A./Wessels, W. (2005): “A common theoretical and methodological framework for EU-CONSENT“, Working Paper for the Kick-off Meeting, Nov 18-19, 2005, Brussels, p. 14ff. The wording of the text has been adapted by the authors of the present paper.

trajectories, and future enlargements are blocked as well. The tendency of blockage due to veto powers also partially disintegrates the Union in some policy areas, potentially turning it, for instance, into a large European Free Trade Area with less governance in a wider Union. Neo-functionalism assumptions implicate that a shift of loyalties creates expectations for the EU to deliver outcomes that – after enlargement – it may no longer be able to deliver due to this growing heterogeneity. In this logic, EU widening leads to a crisis of output failures and to a spill-back of existing institutional structures, leading to institutional blockages in the extreme case. This situation leads to a vicious spiral between overstrain of the new and old members and overstretch of the EU as such. The idea of a circle of output failures suggests that reinforcing negative consequences of EU deepening and widening are at work in European integration.

#### *EU deepening and widening in a stable equilibrium*

This particular scenario would demonstrate that the EU has reached the limits of a stable equilibrium and status quo with the last step of EU widening. It has reached the political and institutional order it is going to live with for the foreseeable future. Within such a status quo “EU without further deepening and widening”, the Union works and exists ‘without illusions’, without a vision, and without strategic views on new projects. Deepening (institutionally, constitutionally, and in terms of common policies) and widening have come to a halt. Instead, the EU floats, flows or muddles through at and around the level of constitutionalisation and institutionalisation defined by the Treaty of Nice. Yet, at the same time no tendencies to disintegrate are found. This theoretical link of intergovernmentalism, neo-functionalism, constructivism, political system building approaches and legal theories of constitutionalisation is particularly attractive to explain the preferences of a majority of member states that fear for the stability of the integration project as a whole which yet might show tendencies of informal systemic developments on sub-constitutional level (i.e. informal deepening or broadening). It, moreover, supports the assumption that at least an extended period of stabilisation and consolidation of ten to fifteen years could follow after the last enlargement round. The EU’s ‘reflection break’ (June 2005) thus characterises the process of European integration during the years to come, and the *acquis communautaire* at the present level (Treaty of Nice) represents the level of constitutionalisation on which the EU is likely to settle for the foreseeable future.

### *EU deepening and widening lead to a re-invented and transformed Union*

This scenario offers another theoretical link between the initial guiding concepts. Following the logics of several theories and approaches (notably (neo-)functionalist logics, liberal intergovernmentalism, constructivism, constitutionalisation, politicisation and political economy), the interrelation of EU deepening and widening leads to a re-invented and transformed Union. So, the construction of the EU-27 re-invents and transforms the EU as well as the views and ideas about European integration. A push and pull process follows with key drivers and forces in a changed and changing EU environment, with an expanded and expanding list of tasks, with modifications of the ‘legal constitution’ of the institutional architecture – resulting in a new kind of polity in which political actors of different origin and background join forces to construct the new ‘European ball-game’. This new kind of polity constitutes a new framework of EU decision-making in which all member states become new member states in terms of starting conditions. Understandings and perceptions, thus, have to be adapted or even newly created. So, this theoretical link suggests a fresh outlook on the EU’s future. It would explain that a new kind of European polity emerges after the last EU widening. Depending on the basic principles and character of this new polity, democratic life would either be attributed an essential role (e.g. in the foundation of a ‘European federal state’) or excluded (e.g. in the reduction of the EU to a great European Free Trade Area). Economic and social policies as well as aspects of external and internal security are either integrated into a deepened and widened political EU or reduced to few, functionally limited tasks. Especially based on neo-functionalism, the development of the EU can be explained pointing at its enormous capacity for systems transformation and change, meaning that the EU had gone through periods of substantial institutional and political change which may, although they each proceeded in an incremental (path-dependent) way, have added up to a ‘transformative’ change.

## **8. Conclusions: Desiderata for a theoretical link between EU widening and deepening**

The presentation of EU-CONSENT’s empirical research results and theoretical conceptualisation has demonstrated the complexity involved in systematically linking EU deepening and widening. Multiple processes unfold simultaneously with different trajectories in different policy areas. To deal with this complexity, EU-CONSENT suggests an informed

dynamic and creatively ‘open’ approach, combining elements of several theories and approaches and casting the theoretical “net” broadly.

However, in order to successfully proceed further theoretical reflection is necessary and further efforts to advance with theoretical-conceptual demands have to be made. Not only does the theoretical net need to be casted broadly, given that for instance also differentiated integration or informal deepening can lead to further formal EU deepening in the long run. Also the definition of further indicators to explain the correlation between EU deepening, broadening and widening is recommended as is the amplification of the theoretical foundation of research by taking also on board anthropological approaches, for instance in order to pay more attention to the perspective of EU citizens and their life within the European integration construction.

In order to advance with the demand for further reflection on theoretical approaches to link EU deepening and widening (as well as broadening) different ways can tentatively be suggested. One such way in view of differentiated European integration and informal deepening as means to proceed with EU deepening even under difficult integration conditions (such as after huge enlargement rounds as the recent one) would be the concept of ‘anarchic differentiation’. It usefully characterises the informal and unruly nature of differentiated integration that exemplifies a central contradiction of the current EU, that is that flexibility and ambiguity could inevitable and yet possibly be destructive characteristics of the European integration process. However, this concept needs to be more carefully defined, embedded in and contrasted with existing theories and theoretical approaches, in particular in relation to the role of institutions and to relevant concepts such as path-dependence, which would appear to be contradictory to the term ‘anarchy’.

Moreover, and partially turning away from the objective of theoretically linking EU deepening and widening, but still underlining the need for a dynamic and creatively ‘open’ approach, some EU-CONSENT members suggest to advance by taking more account of disciplines other than political science. In this perspective, it may be useful to devote attention to basic aspects of ‘what works’ (both in theory and practice), ‘what are the drawbacks to reforms (and theoretical approaches) related to EU deepening and widening’, ‘how does path dependencies impinge on policy shifts caused by EU deepening and widening’ and ‘how can these elements be explained theoretically, combining various disciplinary views’.

The realisation that the object of research is in perpetual flux necessitates such a constant revision and adaptation of the central concepts involved in the analysis. In this vein, new vital issues can be identified coming to the fore after the latest enlargement round: the ‘essence’ and definition of Europe, institutional reform and governance, treaty revision, timing and sequence of EU deepening and widening (including broadening), questions and democratic legitimacy and the future borders of the EU within Europe being the most prominent among them. As a consequence, EU-CONSENT results underline the need for a future-oriented definition of the EU that also points at the necessity to constantly reassess the concepts of deepening and widening (as well as broadening), giving them new meanings. So, in an enlarged EU, deepening is assumed to be high on the agenda with a lot of institutional adaptation and change going on, especially below the level formal treaty reform, i.e. informal EU deepening. Moreover, also the concept of EU widening may have to be revisited, including the question of whether future enlargements will take the form of full membership or whether new forms of ‘strategic’ or ‘privileged partnerships’ that presupposed no full membership, but a partial integration in a coherent system of strong relations, might have to be included underlining a new element of broadening in this context.

Evidently, all these new vital issues and re-conceptualisations necessitate tailor-made theoretical approaches to link and explain future and ongoing processes of EU deepening, widening and broadening. Research conducted within EU-CONSENT has contributed first steps towards the elaboration of this dynamic and ‘open’ conceptual framework that can guide future analyses of this phenomenon.