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**Zielonka's theory of the European Empire:
A Challenge to Theory and Practice of European
Integration**

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Abstract

The emergence of new theory to account for the sui generis phenomenon of European integration has produced a myriad of responses, challenging traditional approaches and creating new debates. This essay analyses just one of these responses, that is Zielonka's model of Europe as a polycentric neo-medieval empire. He argues that Europe is developing into a body with soft border zones, multiple identities, divided loyalties and sovereignties with a multiplicity of overlapping institutions. Although the suggestion of a flexible and pluralistic Europe is not a new one, the way in which Zielonka presents this concept as an original and inventive model for European governance is worthy of further research and debate.

I use the term 'empire' as morally neutral to describe a hierarchical system of political relationships radiating from the centre. Such an empire's morality is defined by how its imperial power is wielded, with what degree of consent on the part of those within its scope, and to what ends.²

European integration is a complex phenomenon that attempts to make the European Union (EU) a more cohesive economic and political bloc. The process of integration has become significantly more complex with recent waves of enlargement, as the goals of 27 member states can vary significantly, leading to complex processes of compromise and negotiation forming the current political environment of the Union. New theories analyzing the complexities of European integration are necessary in the context of an

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² Z. Brzezinski, *Game Plan: How to Conduct the US-Soviet Contest*, New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986, p. 16.

enlarging, and therefore evolving, Union to understand the convoluted systems of the entity and how it may potentially develop in the coming years. This essay intends to outline one response to this developing challenge of identifying a constantly evolving EU, through evaluating Jan Zielonka's theory of the emerging European Empire.³ Briefly, the essay assumes a post-modern definition of empire, which reflects Brzezinski's hypothesis of empire as the diffusion of influence from the centre to the periphery, which is accomplished through voluntary cooperation and invitation, rather than violent conquest. The essay briefly defines the academic and political context in which this theory emerged, the multifaceted reasons for his rejection of conceptualising the EU as a state-based entity, before considering some of the benefits and problems of Zielonka's argument. The essay ultimately concludes that the key strength of Zielonka's theory is accommodating Europe's inherent dynamism, although still providing for alternate mechanisms to ensure unity and ongoing cooperation.

The emergence of new theory regarding the evolution of the EU represents the notion of the Union as a political phenomenon, an experiment in pooled sovereignty and the politics of negotiation. More conventional theories traditionally applied have tended to fail to accommodate for the complex phenomenon of European integration and the existence of the entity as a powerful authority beyond its own borders.⁴ Therefore, in order for a more detailed analysis of the EU as a *sui generis* entity, alternative theories have emerged, such as Zielonka's description of the European empire. His starting point is to assess innovative conceptualisations of borders within Europe after expansion has created a new structure in Europe, that of a 'neo-medieval empire.' Two caveats should be outlined at this point, the first being that his thesis is intended as a polemical response to the existing literature regarding the construction of the European Union and he accepts that any model both over-complicates and over-simplifies engagement with the reality of European integration politics. Secondly, an aversion to discourses of empire within Europe is to be expected, given Europe's tension regarding the imperial legacy of many of its member states.

Zielonka presents a radical approach to the nature of the recently enlarged European Union. He rejects the notion of Europe as a modern evolution of the state and instead argues that the Union represents a "polycentric neo-medieval empire."⁵ Zielonka's argument is predicated on the assumption that,

³ J. Zielonka, *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Jan Zielonka is a Polish Professor of European history at Oxford University who has published in the field of comparative politics, the history of political ideas, international relations, human rights and security. His current research deals with the evolving nature of the European Union and the process of the EU's eastward enlargement. He has also published works such as, *Europe Unbound: Enlarging and Reshaping the Boundaries of the European Union*, London: Routledge 2002, and *Explaining Euro-paralysis. Why Europe is Unable to Act in International Politics*, London: Macmillan, 1998.

⁴ For a more detailed discussion please see for example Ernest Wistrich *The United States of Europe*, London: Routledge 1994; Joseph Jupille and James Caporaso *Institutionalism and the European Union: Beyond International Relations and Comparative Politics Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 2, 1999, pp. 429-430 and Thomas Christiansen "European Integration and Regional co-operation" in John Baylis and Steve Smith (eds.) *The Globalisation of World Politics* 3rd Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005 and Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler *The European Union as a Global Actor: 2nd Edition*, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 15-21.

since the most recent wave of enlargement, Europe in its modern formation is simply too diverse to develop into a federal state, but that does not mean that integration cannot progress. Instead, he argues, Europe is developing into a body with soft border zones, multiple identities, divided loyalties and sovereignties with a multiplicity of overlapping institutions.⁶ It is an empire that has its historical antecedents in empires that existed in the Middle Ages, expanding territorially through invitation, controlling through incentives, engaging in a low degree of universalism and finally, possessing indistinct borders.⁷ Within this thesis, Europe is characterised by negotiation and flexibility, as a model of compromise that allows for the emergence of ‘multi-speed Europe,’⁸ within the more established notion of variable geometry. This idea could prove to be crucial as Europe continues to pursue a policy of widening and deepening integration and allows for disassociation between territorial, functional, authoritative and cultural competencies, incorporating Europe’s inherent diversity.

Zielonka argues for a post-sovereign system where authority is devolved throughout the union and that the enlarged EU will be “open-ended, diversified, pluralistic and polycentric.”⁹ At the basic level of analysis, it appears he is advocating a continuation of current policy in the EU, which is similarly diversified and polycentric. However, he calls for the explicitly self-conscious development of such a system under the auspices of a neo-medieval empire, which would require overt recognition and active creation of an empire.¹⁰ There are inherent problems with this proposition however, as the member states of Europe have strongly repudiated their imperial histories and most have completely dismantled their empires. On the other hand, Zielonka convincingly suggests that integration should occur according to the principles of ‘multi-speed’ Europe so that states can integrate at their own pace. He furthermore suggests that despite the overwhelming diversity within the EU, integration is not only possible but welcome, as long as Europe does not try to develop into a super-state.¹¹ Zielonka argues that diversified and multicentric bases of authority will best serve the integration process, rather than state-based models of centralised authority. This is because diverse institutional authorities will ensure integration is as democratic as possible, rather than being imposed by a centralised authority under the system of a superstate.

He suggests a model of a neo-medieval foreign and defence policy, in which border zones are not strictly delineated, there is a multiplicity of various overlapping military and police institutions, general pacification of the

⁶ J. Zielonka op.cit p. 12.

⁷ Ibid., p. 14

⁸ E. Phillipart and G. Edwards, “The Provisions on Closer Co-operation in the Treaty of Amsterdam: The Politics of Flexibility in the European Union” *Journal of Common Market Studies* Vol. 37, No. 1, 1999 pp. 87-108 and *The Economist* “Coalitions of the Willing” February 1, 2007. The argument is that, with more members and more diverse members in the Union, the more difficult it becomes to reach consensus on various topics, and the less likely it is that all would advance at the same pace in various fields. This has led to the theory of a multi-speed Europe, both as a reflection of the state of nations entering the Union, the agreements shared, and the resulting progress of integration. This is perhaps best represents in the varying participation if for example, the euro, the Schengen area and divergent views on foreign policy, as was evident in the aftermath of the Iraq war.

⁹ J. Zielonka op.cit p. 43.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 191.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 18.

external environment and a belief in the normative right of Europe's foreign policies.¹² Zielonka argues that this form of foreign and defence policy is needed in Europe for a number of reasons. First, the European Union has developed into a unique form of international actor, with very different foreign policy goals and capabilities than those of nation-states.¹³ This requires a similarly flexible and differentiated approach to external actors, given that the various parts of Europe interact with each other in ways different ways, given that "member states no longer enjoy absolute sovereignty" but still possess a large degree of control over their national constituencies.¹⁴ This creates situations where borders are conceived of in terms of a gradual and fluid continuum, rather than fixed and exclusionary lines on the ground. Finally, the US poses a unique challenge to the EU, as it "would like to shape the international strategies, institutions and policies of European states",¹⁵ thus contesting what he refers to as Europe's universalistic claims of being a global paradigm of moral standards, which will be further explored later in the essay.

Historical European examples of empire stretch through history, from the Pax Romana, to the Holy Roman Empire, encompassing the Ottoman, British, French, Portuguese, German and Belgian empire. In most recent times, the Soviet and American spheres of influence both during and after the Cold War were both described in terms of imperial discourse.¹⁶ It is important to outline why Zielonka specifically argues that Europe is an empire, rather than another type of political organisation. This thesis emerges in the consideration of the ever further extension of Europe's borders as gradual and fluid, rather than solid constructs and the insistent export of European norms to its neighbours. However, the EU is still conceived of as a relatively benign actor, as it has extended without recourse to violence. In terms of the most recent wave of enlargement, the conditionality package had never been so intrusive,¹⁷ representing a fundamental power asymmetry between EU-15 and the acceding states, yet again, this power asymmetry was not manifested in conquest.

In terms of European traditions of empire and external engagement, Catherine the Great of Russia is once purported to have claimed "I have no way to protect my borders but to extend them."¹⁸ It is worthy of note that in the lead up to eastern enlargement, similar rhetoric was employed in the strategic objectives of further integration.¹⁹ An interesting comparison to this theory is Lundestad's theory of "empire by invitation", who was himself strongly influenced by Brzezinski's argument of a morally neutral concept of empire, in which the influence of the centre is willingly accepted by the

¹² Ibid., p. 144.

¹³ Ibid., p. 150.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 153.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 157.

¹⁶ Z. Brzezinski, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ J. Kelley, "New Wine in Old Wineskins: Promoting Political Reforms through the New European Neighbourhood Policy", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol.44, No.1 2006.

¹⁸ Cited by R. Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations*, London: Atlantic Books, 2003.

¹⁹ See for example European Council *A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy*, Brussels, 2003 and Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *The European Neighbourhood Policy: The EU's Newest Foreign Policy Instrument*, *European Foreign Affairs Review* Vol.11, No.1 2006, pp. 139-142.

periphery.²⁰ Lundestad strongly argued that America's unique position as a global hegemon after 1945 led it to be a unique source of influence and security in world politics of the time. He argues that Western Europe's attempts to attach the US to a defined guarantee of their security against the Soviet Union at this time created an environment in which Europe actively incited America's security presence and growing empire by encouraging its partner to extend its external influence, rather than alternatively accepting this under conquest.²¹ Shifting away from Lundestad's theory of a reactive Europe perhaps, the EU is now proactively exporting itself as a model for acceding states, in order to secure its own interests of being surrounded by a stable ring of well-governed states, yet again reflecting the image of borders in flux.

Discourses of Europe's extending zone of influence have undoubtedly influenced Zielonka's model, and belong to a broader academic trend of engaging with the so-called 'eurosphere.' In the aftermath of enlargement, there was a need to explain the logic of European expansion, which in the past fifty years had grown from six to twenty-seven states, with yet another seven candidates or potential candidates. Unlike recent waves of territorial aggrandizement in the twentieth century, this process occurred through invitation and voluntary participation, rather than violent conquest. This affirms the notion of Europe as a benign or even benevolent empire, in that despite significant economic and power disparities between the two, integration and cooperation is more intensively and enthusiastically pursued than mere alliances. Furthermore, this also occurred despite the overwhelming tasks of reform in the acceding states, as the Union simultaneously began acquiring the capacity to speak on the international stage with a single voice with the development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). These developments have created a European zone of influence, the 'eurosphere', a discourse which has recently grown in popularity, although it is not universally endorsed. A number of academics have contributed to this idea, including Leonard, who presents a strongly positive view of this willingness to join the EU and argues that the "next wave of European transformation is only just beginning."²² He outlines that it is considerable that non-EU states willingly undertake the arduous task to adopt 80,000 new laws, as Cameron concurs the "EU has never gone out to solicit countries to join the EU, but rather adopted strict criteria for membership,"²³ only inviting the countries of Eastern Europe to join after lengthy deliberations.

Leonard suggests that the willingness of third countries to align themselves with the political and economic standards to the EU have created a 'eurosphere', a vast collective of countries which includes the 27 European member states, the western Balkans, the ex-Soviet Commonwealth of

²⁰ G. Lundestad, *The United States and Europe Since 1945: From "Empire" by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² M. Leonard, *Why Europe Will Run the 21st Century*, London: Fourth Estate, 2004, p. 142.

²³ F. Cameron, *An Introduction to European Foreign Policy*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 128.

Independent States, the Middle East and Africa.²⁴ Indeed, according to Leonard, it is precisely the structure of the EU, in his description of the “power of weakness” which contributes to complex phenomena such as the “regional domino effect”²⁵ as the norms of Europe are replicated beyond its borders, due to the apparent attractiveness of the European model. Youngs outlines this proliferation of European standards as reflecting the entity’s transformative and normative diplomacy.²⁶ His argument is strongly influenced by Manners’ argument of Europe’s “ideational impact”²⁷ as an active exporter of its own norms and values, and attempting to remake the world in its own image by defining what is normal in international relations.²⁸ From this general description of Europe’s soft power, passive aggressive encouragement of reform and flexible centers of power, a dialogue of empire has also emerged. Cooper defines the EU’s post-modern response to threat as an expansion of a system of “cooperative empire.”²⁹ He suggests that the voluntary association of states, rather than subordination to a central power is characteristic of a broader emerging global trend to interdependent economic governance and mutual interference in the affairs of near neighbours to prevent regional instability.³⁰ The discourse of empire has crossed over from the academic into the political realm, when Commission President Jose-Manuel Barroso argued “what we have is the first non-imperial empire... we have twenty-seven states willing to work together and to pool their sovereignty. I believe it is a great construction and we should be proud of it.”³¹ Therefore, the idea of a European empire, as a construction of the EU’s external influence being based on voluntary participation and invitation, carries considerable academic and policy weight.

Nevertheless, the notion that the European polity is developing into a state-like formation should be considered, as it challenges Zielonka’s discourse of empire. The EU has certainly invested in some trappings of a state, such as an anthem, flag, passports, a parliament, a common civil service, foreign policy, security and defence policy and a single currency. McCormick suggests that the governing institutions of the EU “amount to a confederal government of Europe in all but name.”³² Dinan disagrees, stating that “the EU is not a

²⁴ M. Leonard, *op.cit.*, pp. 145-6. On the other hand, it is important to question why states such as Iraq and Somalia are included in this sphere of countries that have been drawn into the so-called ‘europshere’, while non-EU European states, such as Switzerland and Norway, who enjoy integration into the Single Market are excluded. Furthermore, within the context of the EU’s ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) approach to developing and ex-colonial states, the exclusion of Caribbean and Pacific states also potentially undermines the thesis of Europe expanding its influence beyond its borders. Nevertheless, the general argument does provide a beneficial insight into the general attractiveness of the EU and despite avoiding using force as a foreign policy instrument, it is setting standards of global regulation.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

²⁶ R. Youngs, “Normative Dynamics and Strategic Interests in the EU’s External Identity” *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 4 2003, pp. 420-7.

²⁷ I. Manners, “Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?” *Journal of Common Market Studies* Vol. 20 No.2, 2002, pp. 244.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ R. Cooper, *op.cit.*

³⁰ R. Cooper, “The New Liberal Imperialism”, *The Guardian*, 7 April 2002.

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/apr/07/1>>, accessed on 2 June 2008.

³¹ J. M. Barroso, cited by Bruno Waterfield “Barroso Hails, the European Empire”, *The Telegraph*, 19 August 2007.

³² J. McCormick, *Understanding the European Union: A Concise Introduction*, New York: Palgrave, 1999, p. 118.

state... and will never acquire the characteristics of a national executive.”³³ Morgan argues that the grounds for European integration is the development of a new super-state and strongly favours a sovereign Europe that would provide a greater measure of security.³⁴ Milward defines the European project as an instrument of the member states, an organisation which has saved the states of Europe rather than undermining it.³⁵ However, in the current climate of Europe, the possibilities for a superstate are perhaps limited to being a drastic crisis response or an extremely slow and gradual transferral of sovereignty from the national to the European level.³⁶

Zielonka strongly argues against the emergence of the European project of the state, particularly in light of growing complexity with recent enlargement. He defines the concept of a neo-medieval empire in opposition to what he calls “a neo-Westphalian empire.”³⁷ He concurs that alternative theories of the European Union and integration are important for understanding the developing international system, as it has often been suggested that the EU poses a fundamental challenge to the Westphalian nation-state.³⁸ As Rosamond notes, this debate “is certainly accentuated by the *sui generis* character of the EU”³⁹ and what this entails is that the EU is an unique body that theories must accommodate. This is why he suggests both the model of empire and state should be predicated with the prefix ‘neo’, as the EU is a novel experiment in regional integration, and as such, does not correspond to existing modes of political organisation. He argues that a neo-Westphalian empire is therefore the more adequate alternative comparative model to a novel structure of empire.

According to Zielonka, a neo-Westphalian empire would be characterised by hard borders, relatively high levels of socio-economic homogeneity, pan-European cultural identity, clear hierarchical structure with a single centre of authority and a sharp distinction between EU and non-EU members.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the distribution of welfare would be centrally regulated, there would be a single type of citizenship, a single army and police force and the entity would possess absolute authority.⁴¹ It is clear that most of these criteria for a neo-Westphalian empire are not met in the current articulation of Europe. For example, authority in Europe is both functionally and geographically dispersed, and is shared by a multitude of European institutions and the member states. Whilst there are specific projects to prevent significant wealth disparities throughout Europe, such as the Committee of Regions and youth oriented projects, socio-economic conditions vary throughout Europe.

³³ D. Dinan, *Ever Closer Union: An Introduction to European Integration*, 2nd Edition, Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999, p. 298.

³⁴ G. Morgan, *The Idea of a European Superstate: Public Justification and European Integration*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 158.

³⁵ A. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*, London: Routledge, 2000.

³⁶ G. Morgan, *op.cit.*, p. 169.

³⁷ J. Zielonka, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

³⁸ B. Rosamond, *Theories of European Integration*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000, p. 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁴⁰ J. Zielonka *op.cit.*, p. 14.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Perhaps most importantly, Europe possesses what Zielonka refers to as ‘fuzzy borders,’ in that the borders of Europe are not strictly defined.⁴² Although Zielonka does not mention it, this theory seems to strongly reflect de Rougemont’s argument that “to seek for Europe is to build it. In other words: it is the search which creates it,” reflecting an early argument for a flexible definition of the boundaries of the European project, in the sense that Europe is to be created rather than existing *a priori*.⁴³ His argument was that Europe should not be merely guessing potential future developments, but rather “our calling is to make history... and resolutely put into practice a *worldwide policy of civilisation*,”⁴⁴ with an inherent implication that Europe must actively seek to extend its borders in order to defend its model, rather than wait for membership and association requests from neighbours. In the light of future prospects for further enlargement and policies such as the European Neighbourhood Policy, which blur the distinction between EU and non-EU member states, it is clear that state-like defined hard and exclusive border policies are not being pursued by Europe.⁴⁵ Zielonka suggests that the avoidance of creating a state-like policy is approved by the European populace, as was evident in the French and Dutch rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005, as he declares “the European state is dead, long live the European empire!”⁴⁶

Perhaps the most fundamental weakness the pro-federalist argument is that there is little modern support for a unitary European state. A federal Europe would fail to truly accommodate the spirit of ‘united in diversity’ (*in varietate concordia*)⁴⁷ the motto of the European Union. For example, in 2000 Blair called for a “superpower but not a superstate,”⁴⁸ or a situation in which the EU was powerful through being more than the sum of its parts, yet without the result of member states losing their sovereignty. Chirac also affirmed Blair’s claim, stating “we’re creating a united Europe of States and peoples, and in no way a United States of Europe.”⁴⁹ Despite national leaders maintaining the importance of their own sovereignty, the evolving nature of the EU has created an insistent suspicion that the days of the European state are numbered. The mere fact of debate about concepts such as European identity and contested definitions of Europe suggests that the Union has irrevocably changed the political structure of Europe. Indeed, the federalist argument is further undermined when one considers that European institutions were never intended to directly correspond to national ones and nor are they likely to in a post-sovereign system. This affirms Zielonka’s argument that Europe,

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ D. De Rougemont, “Vingt-Huit Siècles d’Europe” in Christophe Calame (ed.) *Ecrits Sur L’Europe: Œuvres complètes de Denis de Rougemont*, Paris: éditions de la Différence, 1994, p. 136.

⁴⁴ Denis de Rougemont, *The Meaning of Europe*, London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1963, p. 113.

⁴⁵ On the other hand, it is important to consider third parties reactions characterising Europe as ‘fortress Europe,’ despite Europe’s ostensible rejection of firm borders in fields such as trade and immigration policy. See for example Jean Baneth *Fortress Europe and other myths about trade: policies towards merchandise imports in the EC and other major industrial economies (and what they mean for developing countries)*, Washington: World Bank, 1993.

⁴⁶ J. Zielonka, *op.cit.*

⁴⁷ European Commission, “European Constitution Part One: Definition and Objectives of the Union”. <http://europa.eu.int/constitution/en/ptoc2_en.htm>, accessed on 2 June 2008.

⁴⁸ Tony Blair, cited in “Blair Calls for Euro Superpower”, *The Guardian*, 7 October 2000.

⁴⁹ “Interview given by Jacques Chirac, President of the Republic to ‘France 2’ (Excerpts)”.

<http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/article.php3?id_article=5899>, accessed on 2 June 2008.

by virtue of its unique nature requires different standards and qualifications, rather than ‘scaling up’ existing models confirms growing diversity in Europe.⁵⁰ Regarding Zielonka’s empire thesis, it is important to remember that the institution of the state developed alongside empires, suggesting that the two may not be completely distinguishable as he suggests. Indeed, the two have been known to simultaneously exist, and even be mutually reinforcing extensions of each other which was evident in the British empire, rather than as mutually exclusive phenomena.

There are a number of significant problems with Zielonka’s radical proposition of a polycentric empire, not least the already mentioned aversion to discourses of empire. Indeed, Zielonka himself recognises that his argument is theory, and that theory can only go so far in explaining realities of integration. His vision of a polycentric Europe, based on flexibility based on opt-outs requires a willing acceptance of ‘multi-speed Europe.’ However, given the sense of crisis that proceeded divisions over the 2003 American-led invasion of Iraq, various Danish, Irish and British opt-outs from treaties and the uneven application of the euro suggests that multi-speed Europe is not popularly accepted either by elites or public opinion. His theory leaves Europe open to general chaos and suggests more broadly the line the EU walks between accepting plurality and diversity, or being unable to function due to the very different capabilities and aims of twenty-seven member states. A system of overlapping authorities with varied mandates and capabilities would be likely to fall prey to administrative issues and result in an ungovernable EU, akin to modern ‘failed states’. Zielonka himself concedes that “an empire without an emperor is an odd concept.”⁵¹ Perhaps, as *The Economist* notes, the “missing ingredient” is an outside guarantor to ensure Europe does not become an inchoate mess and instead smoothly functioning, along the lines it has done so for the past fifty years.⁵² However, it is difficult to ascertain who might fill the mantle of a Hobbesian leviathan,⁵³ given Europe’s rejection of American claims to global hegemony in context of the war on terror.

Zielonka notes a similar problem concerning a lack of democratic legitimacy in the institutions of the EU. For him, “non-majoritarian institutions are often more responsive to the wishes of narrow and partisan lobbies than to a broader European electorate.”⁵⁴ Zielonka here is making comparisons between electoral, or majoritarian politics, such as the European Parliament and institutions which respond to particular pressure from political lobbies or national governments such as the Commission. Zielonka also notes the rather unusual character of institutions such as the European Parliament, which has no ruling majority, governing cabinet or programme to sustain or oppose. However, for Zielonka there is no such problem with a lack of democratic legitimacy in European institutions as he argues that the democratic character of the EU has only been assessed by the standards of national democracy

⁵⁰ J. Zielonka, op.cit., p. 37.

⁵¹ J. Zielonka, op.cit., p. 182.

⁵² *The Economist*, “The Future of Europe: Down with Westphalia”, 8 June 2006.

⁵³ See for example M. Newman, *Democracy, Sovereignty and the European Union*, London: St.Martin’s Press, 1996, p. 87.

⁵⁴ J. Zielonka, op.cit., p. 127.

applied within states.⁵⁵ Zielonka denies the standard role of democratic elections in nation-states; instead legitimacy of the integration project would rely upon local and national communities choosing between different institutions. According to his post-sovereign and pluralistic vision of Europe, political choice would come from the many Europes it would be possible to choose from, such as a trading Europe, energy Europe, environmental Europe and so forth. Majoritarian politics, or the conventional democratic system under nation-states, would not be the device of democratic institutions in Europe.⁵⁶

Rather than advocating simplification of institutional systems in Europe, under Zielonka's model of integration, European institutions would become more numerous, without acquiring a centralised character. Populations throughout different regions in Europe would focus their energies on choosing between the many different institutions available in Europe as the manifest expression of their views of the proper course integration should take in a multicentric EU.⁵⁷ Zielonka's model of a multicentric Europe existing at many levels would fail to achieve the necessary conditions for truly harmonised institutions. For example, growing divisions resulting from the complexity of institutions would come to negatively affect the European integration project, in the same way as the schism over the Iraq War in 2003 cast doubt as to the likelihood of developing a common foreign and defence policy. Given the existing complexity of institutions, and explicit aspirations to simplify and streamline Europe's decision-making capacity in the potentially now moribund Constitutional and Lisbon reform treaties, it is clear policy makers wish to avoid an inefficient and counter-productive duplication of institutions.⁵⁸ Whilst Europe still needs to engage with encouraging greater democratic participation in the Union, this needs to be undertaken with a realist and pragmatic vision, in order to articulate genuinely attainable reform.

Despite this perhaps excessive ambition regarding the European project, Zielonka's model presents strong arguments in favour of Europe's flexibility, rather than avoiding it on the grounds of potential incoherence. His vision of a European empire embodies the developing spirit of compromise in the EU, particularly in his concepts of external relations. As he argues regarding a "cleavage between the centre and periphery,"⁵⁹ this argument adequately explains the EU's existing policy of engaging with states that are members, non-members or even partial members of the entity. This avoids growing concerns regarding the sustainability of enlargement, as his vision conceives of an EU equipped to differentially engage with its neighbours through the application of flexibility, variable geometry and multi-speed Europe. Furthermore, this encourages the EU's budding commitment to differentiation in its external relations, seeking unique solutions to the unique

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.137.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.138.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ European Union, op.cit., and European Union Treaty of Lisbon.

<<http://bookshop.europa.eu/uri?target=EUB:NOTICE:FXACO7306:EN:HTML>>, accessed on 2 June 2008.

⁵⁹ J. Zielonka, op.cit., p. 127.

developmental problems encountered by the states at Europe's periphery. Zielonka's vision of relations with third countries are governed not by strict foreign policy calculations, but rather accurately reflects Europe's trend towards creating zones of prosperity and encouraging Europe's model of economic governance.⁶⁰ Furthermore, this differentiation spills over not only into the way Europe itself presents itself to the world, but also as an aggressive exporter of norms under civilian, normative or even military grounds.

Questions of identity and authority are also less controversial according to Zielonka's model. Indeed, enlargement becomes accepted as standard practice, as shifting definitions of identity make inclusion of states such as Turkey, Croatia, Serbia, even Russia less polarising and Europe itself less of an exclusive club within a concept of blurred borders and identities. According to his thesis, given that authority is shared and spread between various centres as is currently the case in Europe, so too do multiple identities and loyalties become accepted, as sovereignty itself is no longer an absolute construct.⁶¹ Overlapping and concentric circles of variable geometry, reflected in various European opt-outs, represent increased functional convergence rather than the attempt of a single centre to exert authority. This radical vision of Europe, most importantly, engages with the idea of Europe as a novel entity, rather than trying to force this unique body to conform to existing theoretical models.

The European Union is a highly dynamic entity that is constantly changing, formed by the historical, political and economic pressures of integration. Moreover, in terms of forming a common foreign and defence policy, as well as continuing the process of enlargement, Europe has been unpredictably reshaped by internal and external factors. Zielonka's model suggests a vision Europe that is strong, unified and a benign or even benevolent neighbour. It allows for multiple levels of authority and therefore does not require states to cede their sovereignty to a central European government. This essay has not undertaken an exhaustive analysis of his model, and certainly further research could suggest practical applications of his theory, including a more in-depth examination of his models of governance. A dynamic Europe that is multicentric, flexible and pluralistic is most likely to continue the integration project into the future, in spite of major setbacks such as the current impasse surrounding the Lisbon treaty. However, it must be noted that developments could occur at any time that would radically change the nature of Europe. Integration is a complex and dynamic process, one that is continually shaping and redefining Europe's place in the world.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 162.