

Zielonka, J., 2014, *Is the EU doomed?*, Polity Press, Cambridge-Malden, pp. XVI + 128.

In his recently published book *The End of Power. From Boardrooms to Battlefields and Churches to States, Why Being In Charge Isn't What It Used to Be* (Basic Books, 2013) the former editor in chief of the Foreign Policy magazine Moisés Naím makes a following observation (pages 12-13):

In geopolitics, small players – whether “minor” countries or nonstate entities – have acquired new opportunities to veto, interfere in, redirect, and generally stymie the concerted efforts of “big powers” and multilateral organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). To name just a few instances: Poland’s vetoing of the EU’s low-carbon policy, the attempts by Turkey and Brazil to derail the big powers’ negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program, Wikileaks’ disclosure of US diplomatic secrets, the Gates Foundation’s contesting of the World Health Organization leadership in the fight against malaria, and spoilers of various stripes and sizes in global negotiations on trade, climate change, and numerous other issues. These newly and increasingly relevant “small players” are vastly different from one another, as are the fields they compete in. But they have in common the fact that they no longer require size, scope, history, or entrenched tradition to make their mark. They represent the rise of a new kind of power – call it micropower – that previously had little scope for success.

This somewhat lengthy quote can serve as an adequate reference frame for the review of the most recent book by Jan Zielonka (it noticeably draws from his earlier influential book *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union* published by Oxford University Press in 2006), in which his aim is to answer the disturbing and at the same time fundamental question posed in its title.

In order to find the answer, first Zielonka’s intends to interpret the nature of the last crisis. It is generally accepted in the media and by the public opinion that its nature was financial, economic and social. To a certain extent Zielonka accepts such an assumption, but in his opinion it is not the entire truth. The language of economy, business or ethics (typical example: fiscally prudent and hard-working north juxtaposed with the lighthearted and lethargic south, described by the offensive acronym PIIGS; in this way the supposedly weak links

in the poorly designed – but reparable – euro-chain are revealed) usually deployed in order to describe and analyse it, does not reveal its actual depth and extent. This is an ongoing crisis, which in the European Union has unveiled problems reaching far beyond the economic turmoil: lack of cohesion (the crisis has revealed deep social and economic imbalances intra-EU, which cannot be redeemed by the current policies, e.g. cohesion policy), lack of trust (it is a result of necessary but often too strict austerity policies, forced upon the indebted states and thus weakening their sovereignty; the result is the existence of various cagey “Europes”), lack of institutional balance (the crisis has tipped the EU from supranationalism towards inter-governmentalism, with biggest creditor countries gaining strength; it does not mean however, that such countries are the willing leaders or reformers of the EU; Zielonka’s dismantling of the *Bundesrepublik Europa* concept skillfully proves this point) and lack of vision (at the moment the EU does not have leaders capable of rising above the national egoisms, who could have been able to conceptualize a coherent vision of its future, based for example upon the premise of EU-wide solidarity). In Zielonka’s view such amount of parallel troubles is insurmountable – EU is beyond reparation.

As “[i]nterdependence no longer generates integration but instead prompts” irreducible tensions, it is necessary to propose a theory of European disintegration (it probably is the most important theoretical postulate formulated by Zielonka in this volume). First, the author conceptualizes three possible scenarios leading towards the disintegration of the EU: avalanche/tsunami case; reform case (with intention to bring the closer political union, possibly a federation, but instead leading to the break-up, as it would be impossible to reconcile so many mutually exclusive political or economic interests) and stagnation case (basically a muddling through, leading towards a disintegration by stealth). At the moment, probably only the first scenario is not plausible, as the possibility of such volatile events as the breaking-up of the eurozone is relatively limited. The second element is constituted by the analysis of the possible causes of disintegration. Here Zielonka points especially at the EU’s weakening efficiency (i.e. the EU does not protect from the crisis or cannot guarantee the survival of the elements of the welfare states), which in turn weakens its legitimization in the eyes of the citizens

of its member states (its democratic legitimation is already fragile at best).

In consequence of the above, the EU is indeed doomed (and the centralist concept of integration associated with it), Zielonka concludes. But would it be the end of Europe, the end of integration (*Wass, wenn Europa scheitert*, dramatically asks the title of the German edition of Geert Mak's essay discussing the potentially dangerous consequences of the EU's crisis)?

Of course, the new reality described in the opening paragraph of the present review offers an escape route, as the changes observed by Naím are also obvious for Zielonka (although possibly he would prefer a term "specialized power" instead of "micropower"). The disintegration of the EU will not bring back the old ways of international politics, because the states will not be able to recuperate their past influence. In consequence, in the new political reality they must accept the fact that their power is being relativized by the new, capable actors: regions, global cities, transnational trading blocks and markets, parastatals (e.g. transnational wealth funds, extractive companies). This is the opening of the way for the new kind of integration (best described by two metaphors: neo-medieval integration and the European polyphony), centered upon clearly defined tasks and acknowledging the diversity, heterogeneity and plurality of the contemporary Europe. As Zielonka states, this would be a new variant of integration „[d]riven by autonomous functional networks without a strong European center." As a result, the disturbing question asked by the author in the title is answered in a very optimistic fashion: "The EU may well be doomed, but Europe and European integration certainly are not."

Zielonka's argumentation is not only penetrating and skillfully structured, but also very convincing. What is somewhat disturbing however, is the author's integral optimism regarding the future mode of integration. His analysis of the current state of affairs in the EU is very bleak. In turn the heralded paradigm shift is presented as a sort of panacea for all the current EU's deficiencies: the neo-medieval polyphony is going to be more efficient, more democratic, better coordinated, possibly even better legitimized. Of course, such a possibility cannot be excluded. And yet, the present reviewer would like to express one reservation, regarding the necessity of facing by

Europe the competition from such powers as China, Brazil, India or the United States. Each of these countries (even the federal ones) have a strong center of power, coordinating its policies. Would the neo-medieval Europe be sufficiently coordinated to efficiently face such a competition? Would at least a certain amount of the coordinating competence, located at some kind of a center, not be necessary? It cannot be excluded that such a lack of coordinating center would make "the autonomous functional networks" more prone to be influenced by the mighty non-European subjects.

The above reservation notwithstanding, it must be stressed that Zielonka's book is an important contribution to the debate on the current state of the European integration. Maybe it should serve not as an exemplary academic prognostication, but rather as an eloquent, but at the same time chilling wake-up call: his dissection of the various and enormous problems faced by the EU should inspire the European leaders to finally initiate an open and thorough dialogue (with the citizens taking part) in order to answer the other fundamental question: what should be done to avoid the doom scenario?

Sergiusz Bober

Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow  
Institute of Political Science