

**The Perverse Effect of Economic Integration in the EU: Growing Social
Tensions on the Local Level**

Inclusion-Exclusion: Challenges of a New Europe
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1. Introduction

What does the EU mean for us? A solution or a problem? A beacon of hope whilst struggling against emerging economic powers; or an increasing burden on the freedom of local and national governments? It seems to be hard for Europe to steer a middle course when reading this statements. While rapidly expanding its powers over the last years, the EU also seems to have reached its 'limits to growth'. From as early as the commencement of the EU, there have been EuroSkeptics. Those who do not believe in a strong, supranational body like the EU, and are reluctant to hand over national power to the EU. But Euro-skepticism seems to be on the rise. The Dutch and French 'no' to the constitution of the European Union have been important facts in this case. Where do these anti-Europe sentiments emerge?

The theory that will be elaborated in this paper believes that plans made in the highest departments of the EU, can clash with what the people on lower levels (national levels but also on the grass-root level) want and feel. So macro-level plans can clash with micro-level needs and sentiments. In this paper I will specifically address the adverse impact of economic integration, for many of the plans made at the macro level have the aim of greater economic integration.

In between local freeze and global dynamics was the subtitle of this course. The question that will be answered considers this local freeze and global dynamics. The local freeze here constitutes of the micro-level citizens that can not keep up with the global dynamics, being the process of economic globalization and the measures taken at the EU level to keep up with these processes. The research question will be:

In what way can economic integration devised at the macro-level create growing tensions on the micro-level?

First the brief history of this problem will be elaborated. Then will be described what measures of economic integration have been devised at the macro-level, and what the aims of these measures were. After this some examples will be given that illustrate the problem. In the conclusion, some of the possible scenarios and their consequences will be defined.

2. Brief History

At the Lisbon Summit in 2000, the EU has proclaimed to become the most competitive economy in the world by 2010 (Van Apeldoorn, in Stubbs & Underhill, 2006). Rapidly rising economies like India, China and also Brazil are said to be threatening the economic position of the EU, if the EU continued on its current trail. In order to achieve the ambition of become the most competitive economy, there has been enormous market liberalization.

The EU has been going through the process of economic liberalization for a long time. But continuing monetary regulation at the supranational level with the aim of greater competitiveness of the EU (as mentioned in the Lisbon Treaty) can have important disadvantageous consequences for European nation states: economic liberalization has victims as well. The power of the nation states in this process is considerably smaller than it once was, and this seems to be adding up to the feeling that the measures and policies of the EU are getting out of control of the countries. Dutch Minister of Financial Affairs Wouter Bos mentioned the disadvantages of greater liberalization for some Dutch citizens: the fact that many Dutch factories have been closed and have moved to cheaper countries is one example. Another striking example is the rapid rise of (cheaper) Polish construction workers.

In response to the detrimental consequences of Liberalization, the populist parties and EU – skeptics in the EU have gained support. The problem seems to be that the EU is trying to implement measures of economic integration to ‘eliminate inefficiencies in the economy’. In this way these measures try to enhance the living standards of the citizens and have the aim of keeping up with the emerging economies. At the same time though, countries want to maintain their power (self-determination) and the people want that public policy decisions are made by their representatives (Rodrik, 2002). These three demands seem to be incompatible when economic integration is not bound to certain regulations and limits.

The above suggests that economic integration, and the processes of liberalization that have been linked with it since the Lisbon Summit, have created problems and tensions. How can this be explained? Like mentioned, this has to do with the nature of economic integration that has been applied, that is different to measures taken in the past. To understand this we have to go back a bit further in time, to the Bretton Woods conference (July 1944) and the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade (GATT, January 1948). The agreements were successful regulations because ‘...its architects subjugated international economic integration to the needs and demands of national economic management and of democratic politics.’ (Rodrik, 2002: 2; Bannock et. al, 1972). Countries kept their own autonomy regarding the economy, as long as they removed a set number of restrictions on trade and did not discriminate among their trade partners (Rodrik, 2002). But nowadays, economic integration has a more aggressive approach: the elimination of all inefficiencies: removing all barriers to trade and capital flows. This aggressive approach, cultivated by the Lisbon Summit and its aims, has problematic consequences for the political legitimacy: ‘..”deep” economic integration is unattainable in a context where nation states and democratic politics still exert considerable force’ (Rodrik, 2002: 2). The neoliberal agenda of the Lisbon Summit is designed to make Europe a winner when it comes to the competitive, knowledge based economy. But where there are winners, there are losers as well.

Chapter 3 will elaborate on economic integration and its goals and measures and will provide reasons for the emergence of tensions.

3. Economic integration

Europe has been implementing various measures which changed its economic position. At present, the European Union has a single market and (except for the UK, Denmark and Sweden) a single currency. The EU also enforces some socio-economic policies which increasingly affect the national political economies of the member states (Van Apeldoorn, in Stubbs & Underhill, 2006).

So what are the features of economic integration? Jean-Claude Trichet, President of the European Central Bank, mentioned the effects of the economic integration at his speech *Dialogue européen* at the Fondation Jean Monnet pour l'Europe 2007. The first feature he described was the increase in intra-euro area trade in goods and services. To underline that Europe was not changing into a 'Fortress of Europe' but was complementing global integration, he mentioned that extra-euro area exports and imports of goods rose from about 24% of GDP in 1998 to around 33% in 2006. The second feature of European economic integration Trichet brought up was financial integration: the free movement of capital as a result of the introduction of the euro. As for the third feature, Trichet was less content: free mobility of labour. There are still barriers to free movement of labour in the EU. Concluding, Trichet is content on the economic integration the EU has already had. But, he states: '*Nonetheless, a lot remains to be done, for instance, in order to increase services trade and labour mobility and to reduce structural rigidities.*' So more economic integration is on its way.

The necessity of European economic integration
Only if Europe continues to be an economic and technological frontrunner will it be able to exercise the political influence needed to create a peaceful, prosperous, sustainable world'. (Bernard Bot, former Dutch minister of Foreign Affairs, Hofstad Lecture 2005).
Economic integration and smooth adjustment processes are clear prerequisites for the efficient functioning of the European Union. (Jean-Claude Trichet, Lausanne 2007).

Not everyone is as positive as Trichet is with regard to economic integration. Bastiaan van Apeldoorn¹ states that the thrust of the integration process has at present more than ever become one of market *liberalization*. '*The result has been a fundamental restructuring of the prevailing European socio-economic order [...], disembedding the market from the institutions that made up the post-war Keynesian welfare state, shifting the balance between the public and the private [...] in favour of the latter.*' (Van Apeldoorn in Stubbs & Underhill, 2006: 306). Van Apeldoorn states that although the process of market liberalization is a world-wide process, it is being *deepened and legitimately authorized* by the neo-liberal policies of the EU (Van Apeldoorn, 2007).

¹ Bastiaan van Apeldoorn is universitair hoofddocent Internationale Betrekkingen aan de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, en auteur van *Transnational Capitalism and the Struggle over European Integration* (Routledge, 2002).

So how can these processes of liberalization affect the national and local levels? Otto Holman argues that economic and monetary regulation and the supranational level, and social deregulation at the national level are *two sides of the same coin* (Holman, 2004: 714). He states that European integration thus far has been about economic and monetary supranationalisation and intergouvernementalisation. This means that on the supranational level, national barriers have been removed, and the free movement of goods, services, persons, and capital is possible. But other policy areas are still, maybe even more fierce, the prerogative of the nation-states. Removing barriers, Holman calls negative integration. The problem is that positive integration, creating new policy domains at the supranational level, has been out of the picture most of the time. *'...some areas are moved to the supranational level while others are strictly reserved to national authorities claiming national sovereignty.'* (Holman, 2004: 717). So one could say that measures taken at the macro-level aimed at integration, can have the adverse effect of national levels claiming their sovereignty.

The second way in which market liberalization, as a result of economic integration, can have adverse effects at lower levels, is because of the victims of the process of liberalization. As early as in 1944, Karl Polanyi warned for the alienating effects markets can have on society and individuals. Phenomenons like tax competition can 'eliminate economic inefficiencies' as liberals might say, but it can have serious consequences for workers on a grass-root level, who see their jobs disappear. Polanyi stated that globalization should be regulated by legitimate forms of public authority (Mortensen, in Stubbs & Underhill, 2006:172). This is what he calls the 'dual movement': unregulated market liberalization accompanied by political countermove towards regulating market liberalization. Rodrik also stated that, in order to work well, *markets should be embedded in a range of non-market institutions*' These institutions play an important role in creating, regulating, stabilizing and legitimizing markets (Rodrik, 2002: 3).

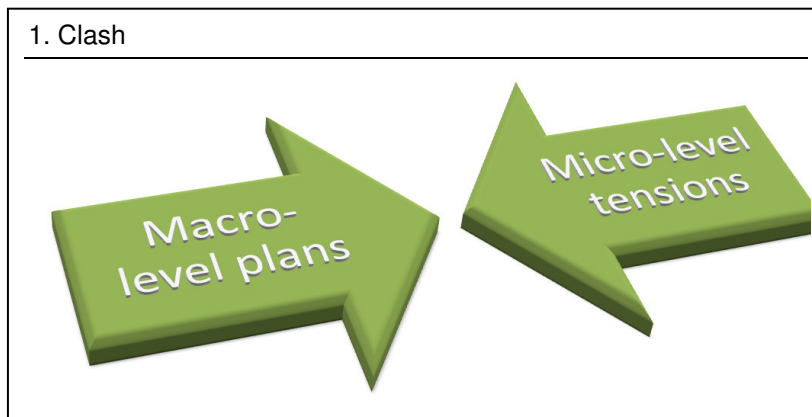
'Unregulated liberalization contains the seeds of its own self-destruction', Polanyi remarked. Is the liberalization process that the EU is going through regulated enough? Market liberalization should be within the limits of what is socially and economically acceptable. But how is 'acceptable' defined and when do we reach a stadium in which the liberalization is not acceptable any more?

4. Examples

Cues that we might be reaching the limits of what is acceptable in terms of economic liberalization are coming from different levels in Europe. Initially, this research considered the problems emerging at the micro-level due to macro-level policies. But within the micro- and the macro-level are much more levels in which tensions can emerge due to policies initiated at the European level: the so-called meso-levels (Paul Stubbs, 2008).

In chapter 3 is mentioned that, under the heading of competitiveness, economic and monetary decision making power is moving beyond the power of the nation states in the last decade or two. On the lower levels, negative attitudes can emerge because people, cities and countries can feel that their interest, values and beliefs are being pushed away by the 'greater' interest of the EU.

There is a paradox in this process: plans made in order to create greater economic integration, might have social tensions as a result. Three examples illustrate the tensions that occur due to processes of economic integration and liberalization.



Example 1: NedCar firing 1000 employees

The first example is that of a Dutch car company in the south of the Netherlands called NedCar. This company fired a thousand employees in order to create 'greater cost-efficiency'. Masuko, head of Mitsubishi, legitimized his decision by saying: *'Due to great competition in the car-industry worldwide, NedCar needs to create greater cost-efficiency in order to prove that it is still possible to have a production with competitive prices in the Netherlands'*. This decision created a lot of tensions under the workers in the region, who saw their jobs disappear. Their demonstrations were useless: even Dutch prime-minister Balkenende could not prevent NedCar from firing the employees.

Although this decision was up to a private company and cannot be categorized as a measure taken at the EU level, it is a clear example of how liberalization and the urge to keep up with emerging economies can create victims and tensions at the local level. The problem here is rather the *absence* of EU measures. In chapter 3 is mentioned how unregulated liberalization can create victims (Polanyi, Rodrik). This seems to be a consequence of unregulated liberalization: under the heading of greater competitiveness, people lose their jobs. This results in tensions and on the micro-level. *'Without a lender-of-last resort and a public fisc, markets are prone to wild gyrations and periodic bouts of **underemployment**. And without safety nets and social insurance*

to temper risk and inequalities, markets cannot retain their legitimacy for long' (Rodrik, 2002: 5, emphasis added). Unregulated liberalization leaves greater freedom to the market, with all due consequences. The measures are taken in order to boost economies in Europe on the long term, but have detrimental consequences on the short term. The workers at NedCar will probably not relate to the long-term benefits of this measure for their country.

How can the EU boost the economy on the long term, but prevent the emergence of unregulated markets which have underemployment and alienating of groups and individuals as a result? The solution lies in what is mentioned in chapter 3: regulating liberalism and embedding it in social safety nets. *'The paradox of markets is that they thrive not under laissez-faire but under the watchful eye of the state'* (Rodrik, 2002: 4, emphasis added). This 'embedded liberalism' can protect the nation state from destabilizing effects caused by the processes of liberalization. (Polanyi, Mortensen 2006).

Example 2: Moving of Nokia from German town Bochum to Romania

In early January, 2008, news came out that the Finnish phone company Nokia has decided to move its factory from the German city of Bochum, to Romania. Nokia stated that it can increase its profits by doing so. 2.300 employees in Germany will be fired due to this decision. *"Bochum was not capable of competing any more. Germany is too expensive for our production"*, spokeswoman Suominen said (De Morgen, 2008). Tensions emerged in Germany and, as a result, German politicians proposed to boycott Nokia because of this planned closing of the Nokia factory. Minister of Consumer's Affairs Horst Seehofer (CSU) and Peter Struck, chairman of the SPD said that they were going to switch to another brand of mobile phone. Even Angela Merkel said that she had compliance with other Germans following this example.

How can we relate this emergence of negative attitudes to economic integration at the European level? Besides the fiscal attractiveness of the region, an important reason for Nokia to move to Romania was the fact that it can receive subsidies from the EU, that are appointed to Romania in order to build up its economic region, a measure which is a result of the economic integration process. Although Manuel Barroso, chairman of the European Commission, stated the EC was not going to subsidize the moving to Romania, the Germans do not trust this. Purely perceived from the macro-level, this movement of Nokia made perfectly sense. Nokia has already begun with building up factories in South-Korea. By moving to Romania, Europe as a whole will gain because the profits will remain within Europe, instead of moving outside it. But visible is that in Germany, anti-Europe sentiments have grown. The Germans state that Romania can receive subsidies from the EU in order to build up its weak regions, and this money is to a considerable degree paid for by German taxes (Paans, 2008).

In example 1 is advocated that the solution to some of the problems created by liberalization processes can be solved by embedding it in domestic welfare policies. The same could be argued here. It is in the nature of capitalism in the free market that production moves to where the costs are the least. This benefits the economy and in this case Europe can gain from the benefits associated with the theory of comparative advantage. But at the same time, societies should be protected from the effects of liberalization by states that regulate the market and protect the citizens from social and economic upheavals. States *and* markets should recognize that there is a multiplicity of possibilities when it comes to institutional underpinnings for capitalist economies, that there are multiple feasible integration possibilities, of which embedded liberalism is one that could suit these problems best (Rodrik, 2002).

In this example, international trade and liberalization should be backed up by strong domestic policies. A strong welfare-state should not (and cannot) prevent companies from moving where costs are the lowest, but they can cushion the effects of these mass-firings by providing welfare policies. This does not mean that no tensions at all will emerge due to these decisions, but it will create greater socio-economic stability because of the social safety nets.

Example 3: Quotum on immigrants because of rise Polish construction workers

‘..The widespread opening-up of emerging countries and of almost all former centrally planned economies has significantly increased the labour pool available, leading to dampening pressures on labour costs, especially for unskilled labour..’ (Jean-Claude Trichet, Lausanne 2007).

Dampening pressures on labour costs due to the opening up of emerging countries is what Trichet stated as the positive feature of economic integration. In the Dutch city of Rotterdam, government and citizens see the flip side of this coin. Since Poland is a member of the EU, there has been a rapid rise of Polish workers in the Netherlands. They often work in the construction business. The EU being one labour market, it is perfectly legal for Polish workers to work in the Netherlands.

But in Rotterdam, social tensions are emerging. In this city, a right wing populist party ‘Leefbaar Rotterdam’ is member of the local government. As a response to the rapid rise of Eastern-Europeans, especially Polish people, they stated that *‘Eastern Europeans should earn their place in the city’* (NRC Handelsblad, 2008). It states that there are at least 20.000 Polish inhabitants in the city (this figure is based on a research conducted by the party itself), and therefore the city should welcome at maximum another 2000 Eastern-Europeans. The party suggests that the national government should strive for a legal basis for this decision on ‘the highest level possible in Europe’ (Hoogstad, 2008). An interesting argument for the statement of Otto Holman that populism is on the rise, (see chapter 1) is provided by the fact that also the Socialist Party, a left-wing parties with populist statements when it comes to European issues, comes with more or less the same argument. The Socialist Party proposed that countries should be able to set their own limits when it comes to the allowance of Polish people to their country (unknown reporter BN/DeStem, 2008)

In between local freeze and global dynamics, the subtitle of this course, suits this last example very well. The local freeze is in Rotterdam, where groups in society can not keep up with the global dynamics, being the opening up of the labour markets. The proposal of Leefbaar Rotterdam and the Socialist Parties makes sense, but can not be legitimized: *‘La libre circulation des travailleurs est un droit fondamental qui permet aux ressortissants d’un Etat membre de l’UE de travailler dans un autre Etat membre de l’UE dans les mêmes conditions que les citoyens de ce dernier.’* (Article 39 of the EC Treaty). Apart from the legal argument, in terms of fairness one could say that The Netherlands does actively use the possibility of capital flows provided by the Treaty. It would be dissembling to embrace this measure that works out positive, and to resist measures that work out negatively for the Netherlands.

This is another example of how economic integration, a set of measures taken in the highest level in the EU, can come across resistance at the macro level. The difference between this problem and the former two problems is, that the tensions rising in Rotterdam are not as much based on problems considering the adverse distributional implications. Of course there is the problem of low-skill jobs shifting to cheaper Polish construction workers. But on the long term, the

liberalization of labour flows can create gains for the Dutch and the European economy. *'..liberalizing cross-border labor movements can be expected to yield benefits that are roughly 25 times larger than those that would accrue from the traditional agenda (the Doha-agenda of the WTO) focusing on goods and capital flows'* (Rodrik, 2002: 20).

So, perceived from the economic perspective, there is no problem. And this is where macro-planning fails: economic logic does not control social and political attitudes on the lower levels. The focus on the problem in Rotterdam, maybe cultivated by populist parties, is not so much on the economic side any more, but is shifting towards identity-issues: for example by the local politicians saying that the Polish workers are taking over the city, or that the immigration has gotten out of control. The attitude of the local counselor, Marianne van den Anker, is significant: *'Eastern-Europeans should earn their place in the Netherlands. If one makes a mistake, he or she should start at the bottom again, or should just return home'* (NRC Handelsblad, 2008).

This being a problem of another nature than the other two, it is hard to argue that the possible solution for those problems, embedded liberalism, works for this issue too. The identity issue is, particularly at present in the Netherlands, very complicated and cannot be traced down to economic integration only. But the principle of embedded liberalism could provide a solution to some of the problems in Rotterdam in the way that by giving the nation-states the possibility of creating strong welfare policies which could serve as safety nets, the people will fear economic changes less because their income perspective would be more stable.

5. Conclusion & Scenarios

The research question was:

In what way can economic integration devised at the macro-level create growing tensions on the micro-level?

From the past chapters can be concluded that economic integration clashes with micro-level sentiments because of the processes of liberalization that are linked with the integration processes. The liberalization-measures create victims on the grass-root level, where anti-Europe sentiments emerge. The nation-states seem to be handing over more power (and control) over to Europe and are not able to protect their citizens in a way that does not go against the process of economic integration, which makes the problem worse.

What will be the future of the economic integration and its problems? There are some possible scenarios Europe might be facing.

1. (Continuing) rise of anti-Europe populist parties and nation states rejecting further economic integration

As mentioned in example 3 in the last chapter, some of the negative sentiments that are emerging on the micro-level are not problems with a purely economic origin. In a way, they might be traced back to measures taken in the higher levels of the EU, but identity-issues are also part of the problem. For example in Rotterdam, the problem might be related to the large amount of immigrants living in the city, and the changing attitude towards these immigrants in the last years. But what is happening in the Netherlands is that populist parties (right-wing and left-wing) with a growing rank and file are capable of cultivating anti-Europe sentiments by addressing the above mentioned problems as being problems that emerge due to the expanding powers of Europe. These statements are popular: an assignable cause (the EU) can be easily indicated and blamed. Designations like the 'European Super-State' are used. Otto Holman of the University of Amsterdam stated that the consequences of the economic integration processes are *'the emergence of xenophobic, nationalist movements in a number of member-states and the rise of an 'inorganic protest-movement' commonly referred to as anti-globalists.'*

The problem is that their point is not completely false either: the Polish construction workers would not have been able to come in such high numbers to the Netherlands if not for their accession to the EU. But the problems go much deeper than just EU-measures as the populist parties are saying. As I said in the introduction, Euro-skepticism is on the rise and the populist parties are gaining support. So one of the possible scenarios is that populist parties continue to rise, which may eventually lead to nation-states rejecting further measures for economic integration. Apart from the European deadlock this may cause, this might have detrimental economic consequences as well, if protectionist attitudes will prevail.

2. Rise of New-Populism

Another possibility is the rise of New-Populism, which Otto Holman stated: politicians are introducing all kinds of solutions to stop the greater centralized decision-making in Brussels. These solutions, according to Holman, merely maintain an *illusion* of national self-determination, while the EU is still crawling towards greater liberalization.

"Introducing a vaguely defined concept like subsidiarity into the European Treaties and by using consultancy terms like best practice and benchmarking particularly in the field of social policy, the illusion of self-determination (and, hence, the illusion of democratic accountability at the national

level under the heading of bringing the EU closer to its citizens') is maintained while creepingly empowering an European 'invisible hand' (Holman, 2004:714).

Governments, opposing the populist parties who are radically against Europe, try to 'sell' the neoliberal structuring to their citizens. Holman brings up the Council of Ministers, which according to him has become an institution that is trying to defend and legitimize the processes of integration by upholding the illusion of national sovereignty on other areas than the economy (Holman, 2004).

While of course predicting the future is impossible, I believe that the EU should strive for none of the above scenarios to happen. The solution does not lie in rejecting all economic integration, nor does it do any good when countries keep on masking the problems that occur (for this is only nuts to the populist parties who can leap into the sentiments that emerge).

In the past chapter I have described the problems emerging due to a mismatch between macro-level plans and micro- and meso-level interests, beliefs and attitudes. There I stated that a solution could be provided by the principle of embedded liberalism, inspired by the old regulations provided by the Bretton Woods conference. The notion of this agreement was that liberalization on its own can bring problems and constraints *'that not only undermined its benefits but threatened the capacity of individual nations to embrace it.'* (Moon, in Stubbs & Underhill, 2006: 433). Recognizing this and providing in solutions to ease the burdens created by struggling towards liberalization, the Bretton Woods design offered countries the possibility to thrive along in the process of liberalization and have successful domestic economies at the same time. This taken in account, the way of solving some problems that emerge due to economic integration could be:

- Applying embedded liberalism, in which the effects of liberalization and integration are cushioned by the nation states (Bretton Woods principle);
- This may result in not rejecting economic integration, but by integrating and liberalizing in the international sphere, and facilitate socio-economic safety-nets in the domestic sphere;
- Not masking the measures taken by the macro-level, but taking the problems that may emerge due to regulation into account, recognizing and addressing these problems. Some of the problems might not be solved, but this may prevent populist parties from jumping into the gap between the grass-root level and the politics and cranking up the discontent of people who feel that their problems are not addressed by the politics.

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