

THE EUROPEAN UNION BETWEEN INTEGRATION AND FRAGMENTATION. A POSSIBLE EVOLUTION SCENARIO

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Abstract. Current European integration, begun after the Second World War, was based on ideas of *reconciliation* and *tolerance* among the nations of the Continent, grounded on common cultural and economic values. However, after 1997, this paradigm suffered fundamental changes when the states at the eastern border with the former Iron Curtain, obviously less economically performant, were invited to EU membership, a move that entailed greater budgetary efforts from the-already existing members. Besides, migratory fluxes from the East of Europe, but moreover from the Middle East and Northern Africa, increased criminality and terrorist risks in the West-European countries. Against this background, the question arises of whether the Christian values, underlying the post-World War structure, are still topical. Centrifugal tendencies have already appeared and the Brexit might well be just one of the future evolution. This paper attempts to provide a future projection of Europe based on two distinct Unions in terms of economic development level and delimitation from the former Iron Curtain, which turned from a political frontier into an economic borderline.

1. INTRODUCTION

Integration and fragmentation within the geopolitical systems is an old, but permanently topical, phenomenon (Ianoş, 2000). While in the past integration resulted in the formation of multi-national empires, fragmentation leading to their disappearance, nowadays integration into the super-national organisations of regional co-operation is challenged by obvious fragmentation, especially on the part of the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional states (Garand, 2005).

Any political formation is marked by two, thoroughly opposed, categories of forces, namely, *centripetal* and *centrifugal*, generated mostly in areas hosting minority and/or/peripheral populations, certain territories tending to detach themselves from under the jurisdiction of the central authority and form new states (Vandermerwe, 1989). The dismemberment of the former Soviet Union, of Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, the secession movement in South Sudan, the events in Crimea, eastern Ukraine, Caucasia, Transnistria and, more recently Catalonia, are but a few examples to support our assertion.

These evolutions occur also at the level of super-state co-operation organisations, in that *integration* (by new states joining in) is counteracted by *fragmentation* (other states getting out). These dynamic processes are acting permanently and bi-univocally at different levels: local, state and region (Kincaid, 1994; Dupont, 1994). The larger a family is, the more its individuals, often with diverging interests, have a say, and whenever divergences are piling up, exceeding a conciliatory threshold, secession, fragmentation, occur. One of the recent most examples is the Brexit. The historic referendum of June 23, 2016 did but confirm a well-known fact, namely, that Great Britain had constantly been among the EU “rebel members”. What appears to have contributed to it, beside the British aristocratic spirit and the country’s colonial history, are the challenges posed by the adherence of new members to the Union, hence higher budgetary pressures on the “rich Europe” opened up new perceptions on and possibilities for what we call “European integration” (Schneider, 2017).

Is it possible to have full and final integration? Theoretically “yes”¹, but history and, moreover, recent events tell us the contrary.

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2. THE EUROPEAN UNION – FORMATION AND EVOLUTION. GATHERING AROUND SOME IDEAS (1945–1957)

The idea of a “United Europe”, or a “European Union”, is not at all a new one, it having guided the thought of some illuminists and political people ever since the Antiquity (Wiener & Diez, 2009). Platon upheld the idea of peace and arbitration through the formation of confederations. The Romans had in view a “pax romana”, aimed at unifying all of Europe under the leadership of Rome. The Middle Ages were engaged in defending European Christian values from a common danger, that of the Ottoman Empire. Europe was “united” under the banner of Christianity against “paganism”. Simultaneously, however, a reverse trend became ever more obvious, namely *individualism*, materialised in the emergence of national states, conducive to a radical shift in approaching the idea of European unity itself, which in Modern Times would rely on national states (Rosamond, 2000). In this way, the 19th century was ideologically marked by the idea of a Europe of nations united by federal principles.

The downfall of the multinational empires and the assertion of national states at the end of the First World War, created the conditions for two major conceptions regarding the future of Europe to emerge: 1) co-operation among the new sovereign states and 2) outstripping national sovereignty limits and beginning a process of unification, of *European integration* (Elistrup-Sangovanni, 2006).

The economic crisis and the inevitable outburst of the Second World War did considerably distance the dream of a United Europe, an idea resumed in the postwar period under the auspices of tolerance and reconciliation in a Europe destroyed by War and divided by strong feelings of hatred between the former belligerent nations. So, the key-words that would govern the idea of European unity in post-war years were *tolerance* and *reconciliation* (Sanguin, 1977). In view of it, the main artisans (Jean Monet, Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer and Alcide de Gasperi) involved in establishing the core of a future united Europe emerged just from the former enemy states. To this end, their political will was strengthened by three common features (Dedman, 1996):

- all had a Christian-Democratic background that accounted for political coherence, an extremely necessary attribute to begin the process of European unification;
- all originated from regions intensely disputed politically, with significantly changed borders after the two world wars, hence much opening to *multilingualism* and *multiculturalism*, being more ready to *understand and accept diversity*. Robert Schuman came from Lorraine, Konrad Adenauer from Rheinland, and Alcide de Gaspari was born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire;
- all were Roman-Catholics, so religious unity had also the Vatican support for European Integration by approaching people and nations.

The six states that formed the core of the European Economic Community in 1957 had been enemies for over a decade before; on the one hand, it is was France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg which had been occupied by the Nazy troops²; on the other hand, stood Germany and Italy, two former Axis powers (Dinan, 2014). A central point was choosing the future capital of a “United Europe” and this was to be that of a small state, the only one among the six countries which did not meet the attributes of a national state, namely Belgium. Before being the capital of Belgium, it was the capital of Flanders, the ethno-cultural community that forms the Kingdom of Belgium; what binds the identity of this country is primarily its European identity (Buyst, 2011).

¹ The convergence theory (Francis Fukuyama, 1992) foresees that once the USSR and the communist systems do no longer exist, the World will enter a new era, of democracy and the market economy, elements that will unite it within a rational structure. In view of it, all the regions of the world will organize themselves according to a new pattern, that is, around the more economically evolved centers.

² The governments of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, in exile formed since 1944, the Benelux Customs and Commercial Union, which became operational in 1947, after the War.

3. ENLARGING THE “EUROPEAN FAMILY”, DOWNFALL OF THE IRON CURTAIN, SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISPARITIES AND ALTERATION OF THE IDEAS UNDERLYING THE EU FOUNDATION

Once formed, the European Economic Community core would enlarge by the successive accession of states from the west and the south of the former Iron Curtain: the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic (Eire) and Denmark (1973), Greece (1981), Spain and Portugal (1986). EU enlargement continued, first in the buffer (gray) zone situated west of the former Iron Curtain, the newcomers being Austria, Sweden and Finland (1995), countries that met both political (old and stable democracies) and economic-social criteria, hence no burden on the EU budget; in other two states from the same category the population decided to oppose this move in a referendum (Switzerland, 1992; Norway, 1972 and 1994) while Greenland left the EEC in 1985 due to some fishing disputes (Grydehøj, 2016).

However, a radical change would occur when the process of enlargement to the central and eastern parts of the Continent was officially launched in Helsinki (December 1999). This process included 13 states: 7 from the former Communist Bloc (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary), 3 former Soviet Union republics (the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), and another 3 from the Mediterranean Basin (Cyprus, Malta and Turkey) (Fig. 1). All these states, whether they had been under the ideological influence of the Soviet Union or not, were economically behind the EU average (Table 1), which implied high costs and risks for the old EU members to take them in. The Helsinki decisions put forward a new development model, basically no longer relying on a single country's potential, but on the potential of a whole geographical region (Neguț, 2005). It was for the first time that enlargement shifted from the economic to the geopolitical and geostrategic sphere (European Parliament, 1999). The integration of the former socialist states offered them an alternative to the old system, sanctioning their leaving Moscow's sphere of influence for good. Nevertheless, the political gain was associated with high economic costs. The Western Countries themselves having benefitted from appreciable financial support (1948–1951) under the Marshall Plan, were the first who had to cope with the costs of integration, by offering the new members all kinds of unredeemable financial facilities, costs that would further materialise in the population's overgrowing intolerance to the process of integration (Booker & North, 2005).

Table 1

The European Union on January 1, 2016

State	Year of membership	Area (sqkm)	Population (inhabitants, Jan 1, 2016)	GDP/inh. (USD) (2015/2016)	GDP/inh. (UE 15 = 100)	HDI (2014)
Austria	1995	83,879	8,700,471	44,777	103,3	0.885
Belgium	1957	30,528	11,250,585	40,456	93,3	0.890
Denmark	1973	42,925	5,707,251	53,280	122,9	0.923
Finland	1995	338,424	5,487,308	41,690	96,2	0.883
France	1957	643,801	66,661,621	37,675	86,9	0.888
Germany	1957	357,168	82,162,000	41,267	95,2	0.916
Greece	1981	131,957	10,793,526	18,035	41,6	0.865
Ireland	1973	70,273	4,658,530	54,464	125,6	0.916
Italy	1957	301,338	60,665,551	30,231	69,7	0.873
Luxembourg	1957	2,586	576,249	104,359	240,7	0.892
The Netherlands	1957	41,543	16,979,120	44,828	103,4	0.922
Portugal	1986	92,212	10,341,330	19,611	45,2	0.830
United Kingdom	1973	242,495	65,341,183	43,771	101,0	0.907
Spain	1986	505,990	46,438,422	26,823	61,9	0.876
Sweden	1995	450,295	9,851,017	48,966	112,9	0.907
UE 15	1957–1995	3,335,414	340,272,834	43,349	100	0.891

Bulgaria	2007	110,994	7,153,784	6,987	16,1	0.782
Croatia	2013	56,594	4,190,669	12,405	28,6	0.818
Cyprus	2004	9,251	848,319	26,109	60,2	0.850
Czech (Rep.)	2004	78,866	10,553,843	18,020	41,6	0.870
Estonia	2004	45,339	1,315,944	18,180	41,9	0.861
Latvia	2004	64,589	1,968,957	14,259	32,9	0.819
Lithuania	2004	65,300	2,888,558	14,964	34,5	0.839
Malta	2004	316	434,403	24,876	57,4	0.839
Poland	2004	312,679	37,967,209	13,390	30,9	0.843
Romania	2007	238,391	20,121,641	9,157	21,1	0.793
Slovakia	2004	49,035	5,426,252	16,138	37,2	0.844
Slovenia	2004	20,273	2,064,188	22,071	50,8	0.880
Hungary	2004	93,030	9,830,485	13,487	31,1	0.828
EU-13	2004–2013	1,144,657	104,764,252	16,157	37,25	0.836
EU-28	1957–2013	4,480,071	445,037,086	30,724	41,7	0.840

Source : Eurostat. Processed data.

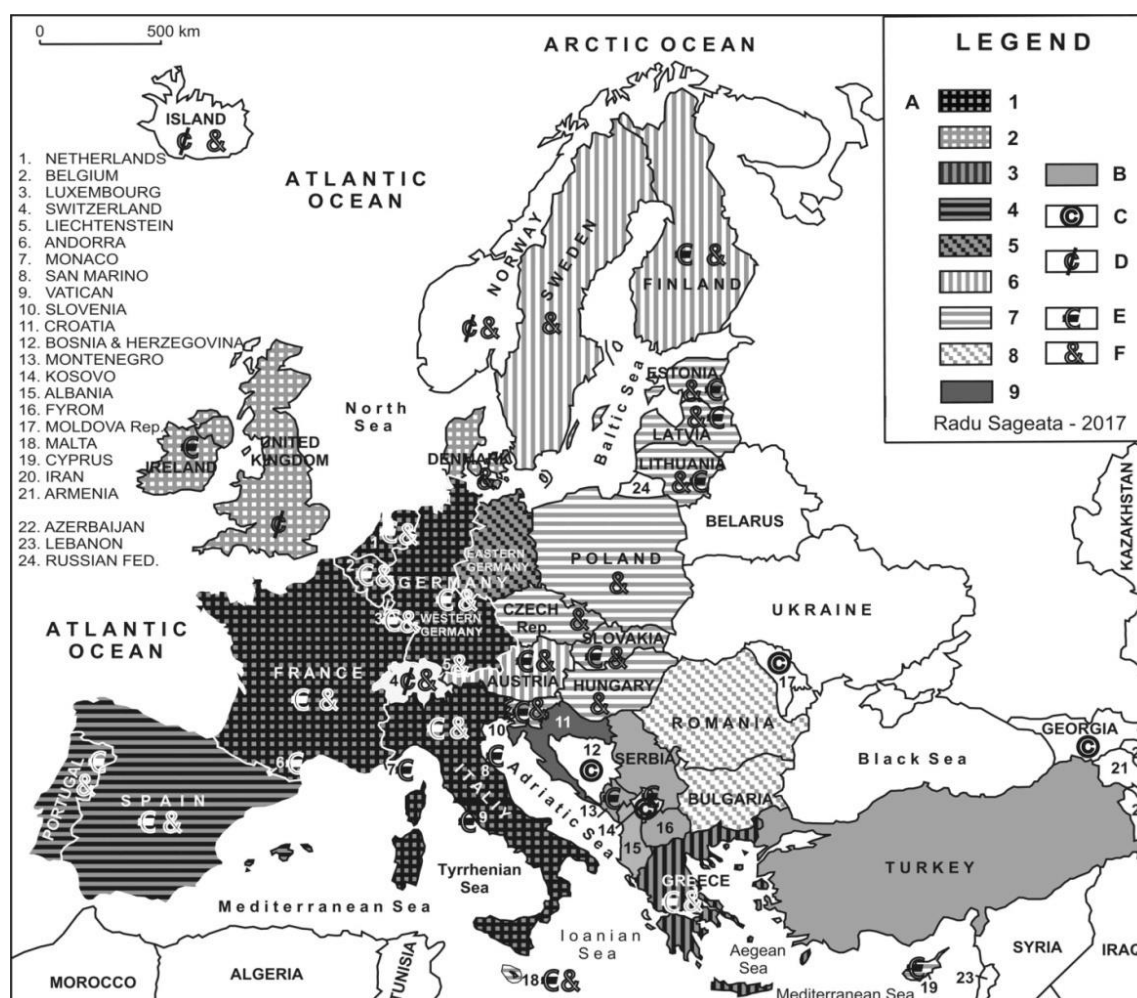


Fig. 1 – The European Union, July 1, 2016.

A. EU enlargement stages: 1. 1957, 2. 1973, 3. 1981, 4. 1986, 5. 1990, 6. 1995, 7. 2004, 8. 2007, 9. 2013; B. Candidate states; C. Potential candidates; D. States refusing EU membership; E. States of the *euro* zone; F. States implementing the Schengen Agreement. *Source:* Author's own mapping.

With new member states adhering, the gross national product/inh. throughout the EU-28 fell by 29.1%, their average gross national product/inh. being of only 37.3% out of the EU-15 average, formed before the year 2000! In this way, the Iron Curtain turned from a political frontier into an economic border within the European Union (Tab. 1). Highest GDP values registered had only the two Mediterranean states (Cyprus and Malta), the smallest in terms of surface-area and demographic size, the only ones among the EU-13 states spared the experience of some communist regime. Next in line came Slovenia, the most developed country of former Yugoslavia, with a GDP/inh. higher than that of Greece and Portugal. At the other end of spectrum stood Bulgaria and Romania, with 31.6% and 41.5%, respectively of Slovenia's GDP.

At global level, post-2000 memberships deepened the contrasts within the EU-15 (GDP/inh. from 1:5.78 between Luxembourg and Greece to 1:14,93 between Luxembourg and Bulgaria).

Human Development Indicator (HDI) values within the EU-15 ranged between 0.923 (Denmark) and 0.830 (Portugal), that is, 0.880 (Slovenia) and 0.782 (Bulgaria), the best positions among the EU-13 sample being held by the lowest-ranking states of the EU-15 sample.

The economic disparity between Western and Eastern Europe is quite obvious. The situation had existed before 1989, being simply inherited, putting ever greater pressure on the budget of the “rich states”, and finally felt by the population at large. So, centrifugal effects were soon to appear (Clark and Jones, 2012), e.g. Island (2015) and Switzerland (2016) with – drawing their candidacy, and recently, it was Great Britain that decided to get out (the historic referendum of June 2016), or the unilateral proclamation of Catalonia's independence (the October 1, 2017 referendum), Spain's richest autonomous community.

Simultaneously, an upsurge of nationalism and ethnical-religious intolerance has been recorded. Economic disparity goes hand in hand with social disparity and, moreover, with an ethnical-religious one triggered by the large number of migrants coming from the East and the South (Johns, 2014). They originate not only from Eastern Europe with whom cultural affinities made Western societies take them in more readily; most new migrants have been coming especially from the Islamic space of South-West Asia and North Africa – export areas of terrorism and fundamentalism (Table 2), who have nothing in common with *tolerance* and *reconciliation* which the EU is based on (Alexandrescu, 2015; Kentmen-Cin & Eristen, 2017).

Table 2

The Muslim population of some European states

State	Estimated number (% total pop.)	Originating from	Concentration areas	Integration degree / Observations
France	5,000,000 (7.5%)	North Africa, mainly Algeria	Marseille (25%) Paris (10%)	Difficult co-habitation ½ French citizenship
Germany	4,000,000 (4.8%)	Turkey, Syria		3,000,000 Turks
United Kingdom	2,000,000 (3.1%)	Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Middle East	London (10%) Birmingham (15%)	65% British citizenship Tolerant legislation 1/3 under 16-year olds
The Netherlands	cca 1,000,000 (5.8%)	Indonesia, Middle East	Rotterdam (25%)	
Spain	cca 1,000,000 (2.15%)	Morocco : 770,000 Western Sahara		Many Islamic State sympathisers
Italy	825,000 (1.4%)	North Africa, mainly Libya and Morocco; Albania		Little integration, extremism
Belgium	623,000 (5.6%)	Middle East, North Africa	Brussels (15%)	
Sweden	cca. 400,000 (4.1%)	Iraq: 127,000 Iran : 65,600 Turkey : 45,000 Somalia : 44,000	Malmö (15%)	Conflicts with the Malmö Police

Denmark	cca. 212,000 (3.7%)	Middle East North Africa	Copenhagen (10%)	The first school for Muslims only (Aarhus)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1,765,000 (50%)	Historical minorities from the Ottoman Empire		Divergences among Muslims; Intolerance to Christians Financial support from Middle East States; Import of Islamic fundamentalism
Kosovo	1,859,200 (95.6%)			
Albania	1 616 000 (56%)			

Source: Barna (2008), pp. 108–116, with completions.

The exit of Great Britain from the European Union was an English choice³, a colonial nation open to cultural exchanges, but at the same time, conservative and protectionist, which had enough of “tolerance”. It follows that conservation and protectionism are simply the reverse of tolerance, while globalization attracts nationalism (McCrone & Bechhoferr, 2015; Paddison & Rae, 2017).

The terrorist attacks, or in other words anti-social actions, undertaken by some older or newer immigrants stimulate the recrudescence of the right-wing movement. France is thus on a tinder-box, while Germany’s historical experience on this line is really worrying. The attacks (in London, Paris, Madrid, Barcelona, Nice, Brussels, Berlin, Munich, etc.) attributed to Islamic fundamentalism, started being counteracted by attacks attributed to anti-Islamic extremism (e.g. in Norway – Oslo and on the Utoya Island, July 22, 2011) (Azrout & Wojcieszak, 2017). In view of the above, the question is, how would the European Union look in the future? Are the principles and theories that governed its foundation still topical?

4. A POSSIBLE SCENARIO. EUROPE WITH TWO DISTINCT “UNIONS” AN ECONOMIC-BORDER DIVIDES

That the collapse of ideological barriers tends to turn political frontiers into economic divides is a reality. Now then, there is no doubt that a true divide between a “Union” of the rich and one of the poor does exist it being separated by a strip of transition, and evolution trends are difficult to anticipate (most likely the tendency will be integration into the former “Union”).

The former Union is supposed to include the old EU-member states integrated before the year 2000; Switzerland, Norway and Island might be interested in joining a Union based on the principle of a homogeneous economic-social potential, being spared the payment of a tribute for the development of the “new Eastern democracies”. Within the framework of this Union, British geopolitics might evolve towards forming three distinct states: an Anglo-Welsh Kingdom, an independent Scottish State, and a Great Ireland, corresponding to the homonymous island⁴.

It is highly probable that this association be joined by the “transition strip” between the “two Europes”, represented by the best economically-developed states of the former “communist camp”, i.e. the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), Poland, the states of former Czechoslovakia (the Czech Republic and Slovakia), Hungary, and the Catholic countries from the North-East of former Yugoslavia (Slovenia and Croatia), the most economically developed ones, that had formerly been part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, having as such cultural affinities with Germany and Austria (Fig. 2).

³ A large majority of Scottish and of Northern-Ireland people (62% and 55.7%, respectively) voted for EU membership, this entailing a centrifugal movement within the Kingdom: Scotland requested a new referendum for its independence and further EU membership, Northern Ireland requested annexation to Ireland, refusing border controls, the border becoming an external EU frontier. At the referendum for Scotland’s independence (Sept. 18, 2014), only a slim majority of voters (55.3%) wished to remain within the UK, 44.7% voting for independence. In the same way, the Gibraltar stated a union with Spain.

⁴ In Northern Ireland, the Catholics-to-Protestants ratio tends prospectively to tip the balance in favor of the former, hence annexation of Ireland to Northern Ireland.

The “hardcore” of this Union of Catholic and Protestant countries might be the Benelux states, England, France and Germany, continued farther northwards with Denmark and the Scandinavian states (Sweden, Norway and Finland). Within this first Union, the poorest countries (Portugal in the West; the Baltic States, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia in the East), hold a peripheral position.

The second Union, extending East of the former one, would be that of the poor countries, also of the Orthodox and Muslim faith, relatively homogeneous both from an economic and partly from a cultural viewpoint, too. This would also be the Union of the Balkan States (Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, respectively), extending northwards (with Romania) and south-eastwards (with Turkey and Cyprus). Within this context, Romania might run the risk for gravitating economically and culturally towards the Balkan space.

Greece is the only representative of the “old EU” (EU-15) to fall into this sample. It is a country that continues to be deeply linked (in terms of poor economic performances, geo-cultural and managerial behavior) (Văcărelu, 2015) to the geographical space it belongs to.

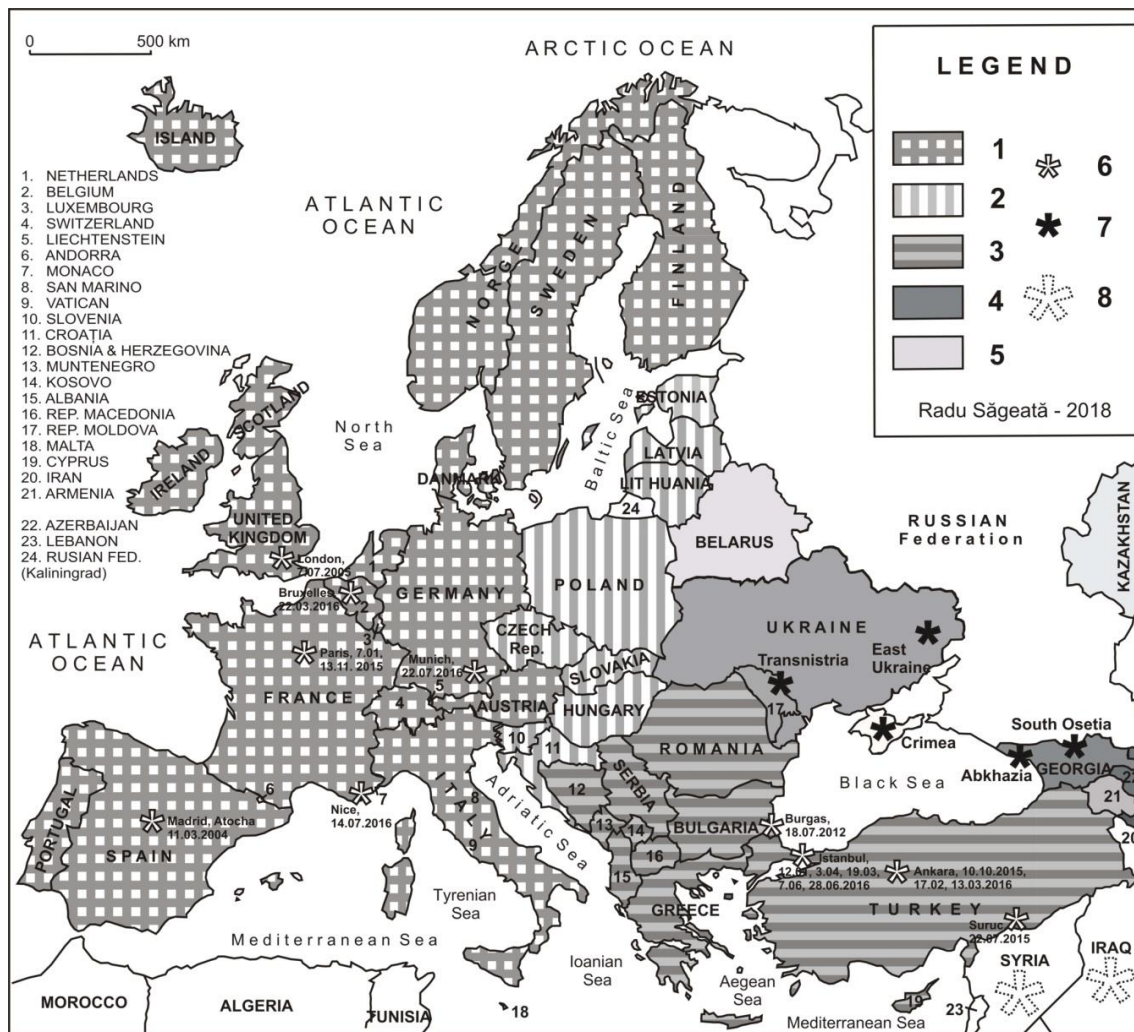


Fig. 2 – The European Union. A Possible Evolution Scenario.

1. The Union of the “rich Europe” – Catholic and Protestant; 2. Transition strip (border countries); 3. The Union of the “poor Europe” – Orthodox and Muslim; 4. Potential adherences blocked by Russia; 5. Russia's allies; 6. Terrorist attacks generated by fundamentalist Islam; 7. Conflictual hotspots–separatist tendencies, 8. Islamic fundamentalism-export states. *Source:* Author's own mapping.

Both in terms of surface-area (783,356 sq.km) and demographic size (79,463,000 inh.), but more especially because of its political and terrorist risk, Turkey appears to be the main instability variable of this potential Union. A democratic state and NATO member-state since 1923 and 1952, respectively, Turkey did not experience in time the formation of democratic institutions as the Western democracies did. Lately, a strong upsurge of Islamic fundamentalism has been going on. The last coup de état attempt on July 16, 2016 is in no way singular, it is the fifth after 1960, benefitting from obvious Islamist support.

Well then, the geopolitical evolution of this geographical space might go towards full annihilation of Islamic fundamentalism and stabilisation of the situation in Syria and Iraq, concomitantly with democratic developments and a solution to the Kurdistan issue (optimistic scenario), up to the “export” of fundamentalism to Turkey, destabilising the situation therein. The July 16, 2016 events in Ankara, as well as the frequent terrorist attacks in Istanbul, Ankara and in the east of Turkey do but confirm this trend.

East of this potential grouping of states is the GUAM group, itself detached from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), with an eye towards the European Union. Azerbaijan is somehow in a more favorable position due to its economic potential sustained by the huge hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian Sea Continental Shelf, and a frozen conflict with Armenia; – the pan-European vocation of the Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova are apparently blocked by Russian-supported separatist tendencies. Crimea seems to be no longer under Ukraine’s jurisdiction, despite “strong opposition” manifest by the West on the basis of international legislation; and the “closer” Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova tend to go Westwards, the “farther” are they from their eastern regions (Donetsk and Luhansk, and Transnistria, respectively). Georgia, in its turn, has to cope with two conflictual situations: Abkhazia and South Osetia, separatist regions with a majority Muslim population.

Another two states from the former Soviet area, basically Belarus and Armenia; the question of their EU integration is for the time being at a standstill, the two countries lying under the influence of the Russian Federation. A possible option for these two states could be a “Pan-orthodox Union”, governed by Russia on the neo-Eurasian principle promoted by Alexander Dughin, provided they maintain the present geopolitical trend. Also in this case, any scenario can evolve; from assimilation to EU integration of a post-Putin Russia, together with its “satellites”.

5. CONCLUSION

The evolution of the European Union may go from integration to fragmentation, just as in any political system: integration centred around some common moral principles and cultural values is associated with fragmentation caused by the distinctively different potential of states and regions. Moreover, the ever greater challenges posed by migrational fluxes from the East and South, triggering social tensions, contribute to increasing terrorist risk and intolerance to migrants. In view of the above, and of the current centrifugal trends, a EU evolution scenario has been devised based on a homogeneous economic potential, cultural values and strategic alliances.

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