

Working Group History

Workpackage IV: The Lisbon Treaty in a court, moyenne and longue durée perspective

Agenda

Thursday 10th May 2012

16.00 – 17.30 h

Fondation Universitaire, Rue d'Egmont 11

Salle D

“Crises in EU history: Lessons of the past?”

Outline:

The Working Group discussed the experiences of past crises in EU history: In what respect the current crisis is different from earlier crises? Is it useful to distinguish between “crises of integration” and “crises in integration”? How the different crises have influenced the development of the EU? And what about crisis management? Can good and bad examples of such a management be identified? Which would the criteria to distinguish “good” from “bad” management?

Chair:

Wilfried Loth, University Duisburg Essen, Germany

Introductory Statements:

Michael Gehler, University of Hildesheim, Germany

Wilfried Loth, University Duisburg Essen, Germany

Discussion

Report

In his capacity of chair of the Working Group “The Lisbon Treaty in a court, moyenne and longue durée perspective”, *Wilfried Loth* (University of Duisburg-Essen) welcomed the participants to its second session.

Discussions were based on two introductory presentations. *Michael Gehler* (Hochschule Hildesheim) gave the main presentation, entitled “Challenges and Opportunities. Surmounting Integration Crises in Historical Context”. He dealt with the understanding and comprehension of the dynamics of European integration as a consequence of rifts and breaks and the results of crisis experiences. Due to the non-linearity and “trial and error” characteristic of European integration, he argued in favour of the term “integration dynamics” instead of “integration process”.

Starting by differentiating between types of crises – political, economic, social, ideological, psychological, cultural, intellectual, but also national, colonial-power specific, European, and international –, M. Gehler focused on two basic categories: crises of the system and of trust on the one hand, and crises of the person and of negotiation on the other. He underlined, however, that these crises might not only have negative, but also positive effects in a constructive sense.

His brief overview on internal crises in EU history, starting with failure of the European Defense Community in 1954 and ending with the EU’s legitimacy crisis following the enlargements of 2004/07 and the limbo with regard to its legal foundations (Constitutional Treaty, Lisbon Treaty) provided the backdrop for some generalisations on crisis scenarios. Inter alia, he argued that external factors had more of a supporting and stimulating effect for integration dynamics, while the impact of feared or fictiously imagined crises such as the “Eurosclerosis” in the 1970s should not be neglected.

The presentation concluded with a look at the role of the EU’s half-year presidencies and the structural weakness of this construction in reacting to crises. He also argued that the crises the EU is currently faced with did not really relate to the EU, but rather to the post-national Member States, their democracies, societies, economies, and party systems. Crises had been “the great unifier” in the words of Jean Monnet because their management unveiled productive potential. One might even go so far to speak of a “necessity for crises”, without which the dynamics of integration would not have gotten by: most attempts at reorganisation arose from emergency situations. One of the greatest of such setbacks in the history from the EEC to the EU was Charles DeGaulle’s veto victory with the Luxembourg compromise in 1966. This was also the topic of the second (shorter) presentation, entitled “Who did prevail in the crisis of the ‘empty-chair’? New findings about the archetype of EC/EU-crises”. *Wilfried Loth* (Universität Duisburg-Essen), focused on this particular crisis in EU history and illustrated some links to the more general approach of M. Gehler.

In the general discussion, the number of crisis and their typology proposed by M. Gehler drew some critical remarks, however, his main thesis that European integration itself is the result of good crisis management was commonly shared by the participants of the working group.

Jean-Marie Majerus and *Guido Lessing* (CERE R. Schuman, Luxembourg) raised the question about the role of small member states in crisis management: especially the role of Luxembourg proved that small states had and have their role to play as mediator, particularly between the “heavyweights” in terms of resources, France and Germany.

The Working Group recalled that the sovereign debt crisis was linked to the outbreak of the banking crisis of 2008 in the US. Against that background, the crisis the eurozone currently faces was not purely homemade; nonetheless, it required European answers. Participants discussed the current financial and economic crisis’s complexity in particular regarding the legitimacy deficit of the proposed solutions; distinguishing between output and input legitimacy. It was held that large parts of the public seemed to have the impression that further European integration was not the right answer to the current problems of unemployment and economic decline, indicating that the permissive consensus concerning European integration might have come to an end.

Johannes Müller Gómez (University of Cologne)