

EURO POLIS

Journal of Political Analysis and Theory

Issue 4 December 2008

Book review

Neil Fligstein. 2008. Euroclash: The EU, European Identity and the Future of Europe.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 296 pages.

Reviewed by Gulsen Seven

ISSN: 1582-4969

Edited and published by the:

Centre for Political Analysis

Department of Political Sciencea

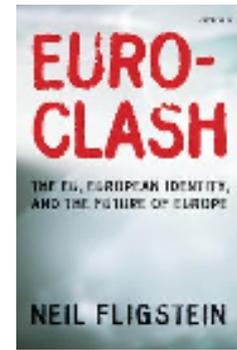
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The literature accumulated on the European Union within the fields of economics, political science and international relations has concentrated on top-down processes of policy-making and on the institutional structure of the EU in order to discern the success of the project in integrating European states into a larger framework of interaction, cooperation and coordination. One of the main questions, in this regard, has been whether the EU constitutes a supranational body above nation-states, or an intergovernmental organization relating them. This question is also linked to discussions on the future of Europe, that is, whether the EU will survive through greater integration or whether it will wither away and become redundant in the face of the continuing strength of the nation-states. Taking this question at the centre of his analysis, Fligstein proposes a new methodological perspective for the analysis of the future of Europe. Thus, “Euroclash: The EU, European Identity and the Future of Europe” is, first and foremost, a sociological study of the European Union that presents a societal perspective for the study of an institutional structure, the EU, as it has been conceptualized and studied until now.

The new perspective as it has been suggested by Fligstein emphasizes the dynamics of the society at the centre of the analysis of European Union. The dynamics of society are expressed on the basis of the notion of “social fields” referring to arena of regular social interaction among people, governed by shared understandings and rules. The main argument is that the process of economic integration in the context of Europe that was initiated 50 years ago, has not only resulted in increased economic interdependence, but has also contributed to the formation of new social fields (economic, political, civil associational and so on) or horizontal linkages. The first part of the book, comprising chapters from 2 to 4 documents in detail, the historical formation of economically integrated Europe, that is to say, of European market. Although there are numerous books and articles written on this issue,

the novelty that the author brings in his analysis is to link economic integration to political and legal integration, since each and every economic structure necessitates its own legal and political structure, which it can build upon. However, legal and political integration, besides economic ones, constitute only the structural dimension of the whole process of integration, which has also culminated in formation of new fields of social interaction and integration for the social actors of European societies. The significance of the opening of spaces of regular social interaction has been promotion of the development of a European society that is marked by the reign and primacy of European identity over fragmented national identities. However, what is striking in the context of the EU is the fact of underdevelopment of European identity, which is revealed in surveys. It is to this issue that the author turns in the second part of the book composed of chapters from 5 to 7.

The main tenet of the second part of the book is to link the fact of underdevelopment of European identity to the class structure of European society, which is marked by inequalities of wealth, status and income. Drawing upon Eurobarometer data and conceptualizing the notion of class on the basis of Weber's understanding, although not explicitly stated, the author demonstrates that it is the upper-middle class people (business people, managers, professionals and so on), who have *directly* benefited from the opening of new fields of social interaction that claim themselves as Europeans. Those, who have been *directly* 'harmed' by the process, on the other hand, are lower class people and they stick to their national identities seeking national protection in the face of harmful effects of further integration. In the middle, lay middle and lower-middle class people -mostly young, educated professionals and students-, who have benefited from the project in some ways, but, who, nonetheless, have some reservations about greater integration. The clash between the three forces depicted above, forms the basis of *Euroclash* and the future of Europe is dependent, mostly, on the support of the middle class, that is to say, on swing voters, since it is those people that would be instrumental in promoting the establishment of common European culture, where the shared understandings among the people would supersede the differences in social classes. The importance of the swing voters is argued to be revealed by the increasing importance of fields of social interaction that are aimed at people falling into the middle-class category. Yet, the problematic aspect of the account of fields that have been Europeanized is the lack of the author's distinguishing between the

fields that are Europeanized and the fields that have been globalized. In other words, although Fligstein mentions Europeanization of media, defence industry, telecommunications and education, it is not clear whether the Europeanization is the product of a larger trend towards globalization of those industries in the reign of neo-liberal economic principles of deregulation and privatization.

Overall, the major contribution of the book is the urge for a sociological perspective to enter into analysis of the European Union, which until now has remained under the exclusive jurisdiction of state-centric standpoints. It is only through such a methodological twist that the contemporary problems facing the Union may be tied to the problems of capitalism in general and dealt with accordingly, which is a timely urge when the contemporary crisis of capitalism is taken into account. Thus, the book is highly recommended to academics studying the European Union, who would like to discern a different methodological approach to the issue, as well as to people who are interested in understanding the dynamic constellation at the heart of the project of the EU, between the structural components of capitalism on the one hand, and the impact of the social actors on the structural mechanisms on the other.