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Volume 22, 2015 - Issue 2: European integration in times of crisis: theoretical perspectives

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European economic integration in times of crisis: a case of neofunctionalism?

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Pages 196-218 | Published online: 08 Jan 2015

Cite this article

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2014.994021>

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ABSTRACT

This contribution analyses the relevance of neofunctionalist theory and the various spillover mechanisms for explaining the management of the crisis and the drive towards a more complete Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). The management of the crisis resulted in integrative outcomes owing to significant functional dissonances that arose from the incomplete EMU architecture created at Maastricht. These functional rationales were reinforced by integrative pressures exercised by supranational institutions, transnational organized interests and markets. The contribution concludes that, despite shortcomings, neofunctionalism provides important insights for understanding the integrative steps taken during the crisis.

KEY WORDS:

Economic and financial crisis

Economic and Monetary Union

European integration

neofunctionalism

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Markus Knedelhans, Linda Koch and Tobias Tesche for their research assistance. The views expressed in the article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Central Bank.

Notes

1 In his second edition of *The Uniting of Europe*, Haas ([1968](#)) pointed out that élites are more likely to follow economic advantages pragmatically rather than developing a deeper concern for European integration, thus no longer banking on their longer-term integrative support.

2 This indicated that the various types of spillover are closely interlinked and cannot be clearly separated from each other (Niemann [2006](#): 50–1).

3 While Haas emphasized the role of the High Authority/ Commission, later on neofunctionalism was often interpreted as viewing the role of supranational institutions, more generally, as an integrative dynamic.

4 Functional spillover logic within EMU is also evident in legal EU texts, such as the 'fiscal compact' (European Council [2012b](#): 7).

5 That is, European Council President van Rompuy, Commission President Barroso, Eurogroup President Juncker and ECB President Draghi.

6 The section on political spillover as well as those on the Commission and the European Parliament partly draws on Koch ([2013](#)), whose masters thesis one of the authors supervised.

7 In this contribution we have focused on business interest groups as the largest and best documented segment of organized interests in this sector.

8 Compare BusinessEurope ([2010a](#), [2010b](#)) with European Commission ([2010a](#), [2010b](#)) and European Council ([2010](#)). Also cf. Knedelhans ([2014](#)).

9 To include financial markets within the notion of political spillover may be contested, as it is doubtful whether they undergo (deeper) learning processes, an assumption that was dropped, however, during the first revisions of the theory in the late 1960s (cf. note 3). In that spirit, the inclusion of financial markets as actors seems justified. In addition, their very high degree of autonomous acting fits core neofunctionalist maxims.

10 For a timeline of the measures taken by euro area, EU and global authorities during the crisis, see: <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb/html/crisis.en.html> (accessed 1 April 2014).

11 But see Niemann ([2006](#)) for such a revised neofunctionalist framework.

12 For example, a number of elements identified in the Four Presidents' Report (Van Rompuy [2012](#)) have yet to be dealt with, suggesting that the updated EMU architecture still entails potentially significant functional dissonances.

Additional information

Biographical notes

Arne Niemann is professor of international politics and Jean Monnet Professor of European Integration at the University of Mainz.

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