

# **“Ecologism” as an Attempt to Overcome the Ideological Crisis of "Europeanism"**

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**Abstract:** Successful European integration requires its own ideology. This is "Europeanism". In this article "Europeanism" is examined as an internally contradictory combination of irrational and rational considerations, officially presented as part of the paradigm of the European Enlightenment. After the expulsion of rival ideologies, neoliberalism builds the basis of today's Europeanism, which claims to be scientific, together with the several integration theories. Practice refutes most of these rational constructions after the 2008 crisis, both economically and politically. Integration theories cannot explain why the free market is failing. The crisis in the Eurozone 2011 revitalized economic nationalism and contributed to the erosion of the dominant paradigm. In the political field Europeanism has failed in its attempt to transform the EU's immediate environment in a positive way. The enforcement of multiculturalism, despite acknowledgments that it “has failed”, has split the Union internally. The reaction is a collapse of the belief in neoliberalism and hence the rise of Euroscepticism. In an attempt to organize some kind of "Counter-Reformation" in search of the lost loyalty, the European elite is trying to renew and supplement the ideological basis of the integration with one of the directions of (delete ‘the’) left-wing neoliberalism, namely "ecologism". It tries to impose - both domestically and internationally, the fight against "global warming" as an irrational cause that will give a new impetus to social development and integration in particular, as well as (delete ‘to’) solve specific problems of the energy poor European Union. The ecological ingredient in Europeanism is very suitable psychologically - "alarmism" is very well received by some rich and “anxious” societies. Economically it could help the energy poor Union to restrain its competitors on the world market. But the success of this attempt does not seem certain.

**Keywords:** Ideology, Europeanism, Neoliberalism, Ideological Crisis, Ecologism

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## **1. Introduction**

Successful European integration, like any other political endeavour, is impossible without ideology, in the absence of institutionalized religion. Securing order in human relations is easiest by maintaining an inner conviction among members of the human community that rules are good for all and that following them ensures survival and successful development. First of all, religion, and, more recently, ideologies have taken on the commitment to support the exercise of power in society, insofar as pure violence and/or the simple "buying" of consent and loyalty have their limitations. But the ideological basis of European integration has been eroding recently due to inherent internal contradictions, which are further exacerbated by the unfavourable external situation.

Our goal is to point out some of these internal discrepancies and to clarify their nature. Bypassing them threatens the failure of the entire integration project, and the consequences of this failure can be as severe as the consequences of the collapse of the USSR in 1990.

## **2. Methodology**

Religion performs the task of maintaining cohesion and balance within society by successfully addressing the irrational side of man. But the modern European societies are mostly secular in nature and many scientists and scholars argue that European integration is based on the spiritual heritage of the Enlightenment [1], also known as Age of Reason. The Enlightenment addressed the rational side of man

and built the foundation of the social engineering as a set of approaches of applied sociology aimed at rational changes in social systems based on fundamental knowledge about society and predicting the possible results of transformations [2]. Yet it was out of this scheme that the modern Western ideologies like liberalism, nationalism and communism emerged, each aimed at constructing the perfect society in its own way.

The Enlightenment belief in the universal applicability of the exact sciences with their formal, axiomatic character also marked the development of (delete 'the') social sciences (e.g. sociology), on which the social engineers relied.

Hence the paradox - the mentioned ideologies claim a "scientific basis" and their statements acquire an imperative character, with claims to a monopoly on truth. (A physical law can only be described by a single equation, not by a variety of different equations.) Unlike the exact sciences, which obey the facts and change their formulations accordingly, the formulations in (delete 'the') social sciences often become unchangeable dogmas, as they must serve the power relations in society. Challenging them is condemned as a "heresy". Thus the ideologies as derivatives of rational thinking become something like the religion denied by this same worldview.

Constructing the perfect society on formal foundations finally appeals to the irrational side of man once again. (Perhaps this is inevitable, since the irrational ingredient in human nature cannot be suppressed.) The attempt to place the ideology only on a scientific (reasonable) basis usually brings controversial results, as is the case with the "scientific" justifications of European integration – the several integration theories.

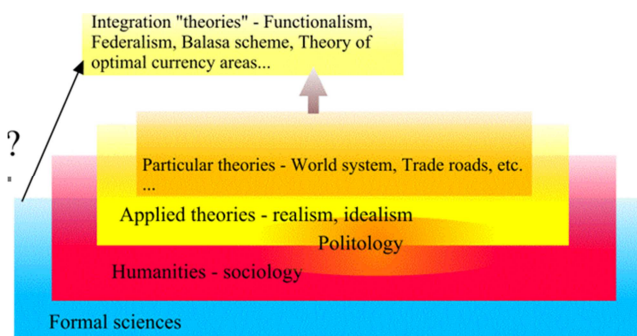


Figure 1. Pyramid of the theoretical approach to European integration.

Source: Chankov, G., The European Union from a systemic point of view, Volume 1, Scientific approach to integration: theories, models and concepts. Ideology, Sofia, Avangard Prima, 2020

### 3. Ideological Basis of Europeanism

After the defeat of communist ideology, the West joined by the former socialist countries imposed a seemingly de-ideologized model of social development, with the implication that "freedom (truth) has defeated ideology (lie)." The EU is praised from the beginning as an anti-ideological project. In order to avoid a new devastating war in Europe it had to reject fascism and nationalism. What is more, it had to compete also with the successful in the post-war period

communism. Because of these ideologies, the very concept of "ideology" is burdened with an unequivocally negative meaning. But at the same time *"the EU is associated with openness, internationalism, and cosmopolitanism. It is considered a model for the entire world."* [3]

If so, this model must be drawn on someone's drawing board. So there is no official EU ideology, but it inevitably exists. This is "Europeanism", a concept that became famous in the speeches and writings of the former Czech president and "Eurosceptic" Vaclav Klaus [4]. In the Eastern European countries that have joined the EU, the word "Europe" and its derivatives is constantly used in a positive sense and acquires an almost religious connotation: the political equivalent of excellent functioning institutions and good governance is referred to as *"European development", "European models", "European norms",* etc. [5].

Modern Europeanism emerges in the 50s of the 20th century as a pacifist negation of nationalism, which prevailed during the creation of nation-states in the 19th century. For some time, Europeanism has been viewed on a different level from the traditional rivalling European ideologies - right and left. From the late 1960s to the early 1990s, however, in Western European societies, as a result of the transition of capitalism to a parasitic, financial phase, the renewed edition of liberalism succeeded in pushing out rivalling conservatism and socialism, incl. by changing and replacing their basic ideological positions - in the economic field (delete 'the') liberalism turned "right" with the variant of market fundamentalism ("Thatcherism", "Reaganomics"), and in the cultural and political field it identified with the socially weak ethnic, religious and sexual minority groups. It engaged with their protection, imposing this line on the classical socialist and social democratic parties that were gradually losing their social base). Without ever being most strongly represented - neither in national parliaments nor in the European Parliament, parties calling themselves officially "liberal" have imposed since 1990 their agendas on most Western European countries. Neoliberalism dominates now politically to the extent that "liberal democracy" is now considered the only correct form of democracy, and insofar as democracy is officially the highest value of European integration, we have seen a sign of equality between "Europeanism" and "neoliberalism" since the 1990s. If *"initially EU integration was an economic vehicle"* [6], it was recently transformed into a tool for transforming the union into a moral community. For an analysis of the construction of Euroscepticism in the Economist, see Bratanova. [7]

### 4. Ideological Crisis

#### 4.1. Economic Dimensions

The political supremacy of neoliberalism ended in 2008, also because its claims to the scientific justification of European integration (neo-functionalism, Bela Balassa scheme, Optimal Currency Areas Theory) became vulnerable to practical results.

Economic growth is a sacred dogma of neoliberal thinking.

Its presence confirms the correctness of the overall concept of social development. Downturns and delays are a source of doubt and political tension. It is no coincidence that integration found the greatest political support in the 1960s and 1970s, when the GDP growth in the EC averaged 4.8% between 1960 and 1973 [8]. Overcoming the ensuing "Eurosclerosis" was done by promises of accelerated economic growth in the Cecini report [9], which should

convince citizens of the benefits of the internal market.

However, the stagnation in the EU economy after 2008 is not explained. Integration theories cannot explain why the free market is failing. (They do not, for example, work with concepts such as 'negative interest rates'.) But if the free market inexplicably fails and prosperity is called into question, then the whole Locke, Kant and Fukuyama concept of 'peace through trade' is also in question.

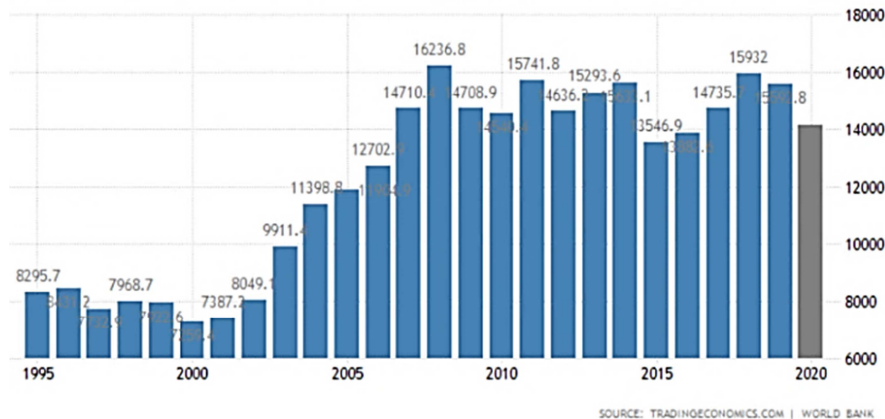


Figure 2. Economic growth of the EU.

The technocratic neoliberal concept of the "4 market freedoms" within the Single Market of the EU is still not subject to discussion and challenge, but the stubborn adherence to it, incl. to the requirement of free movement of people, is one of the reasons for Britain's exit from the union. According to the theoretical assumptions, the completion of the Single Market in 1993 should increase the share of mutual trade among (delete 'the') member states. The data do not confirm this: in 1990 the mutual trade in the EC of 12 Member States amounted to 65.5%, yet by 2015 this share dropped to 63%, despite the mechanical growth of the Union to 28 Member States [10]. I.e. the removal of non-tariff barriers to free trade (through standardization) did not yield the results predicted by science and desired by ideology. But no one acknowledges the failure of this neoliberal theoretical construction.

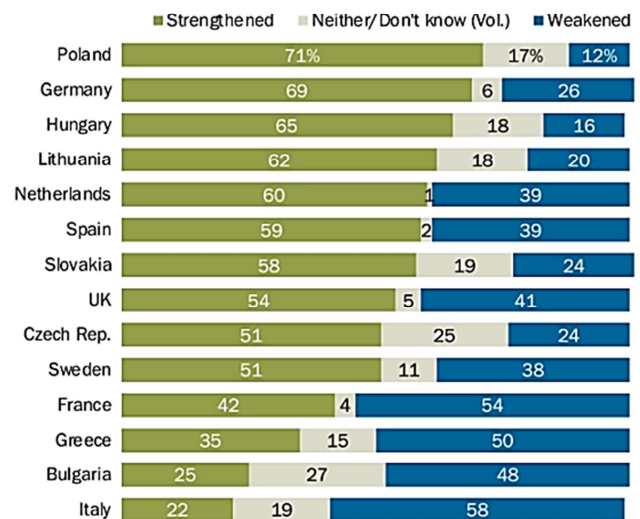
The creation of the "eurozone" at the beginning of the 21st century is part of the above logical scheme for the completion of the Single Market. The common currency in the EU should increase the overall economic efficiency and competitiveness, but rather it increased the disparities in wealth among member-countries. The crisis in the Eurozone 2011 has pitted "thrifty northerners" against "lazy southerners". The rejected by integration nationalism unexpectedly revitalized in the economic field and the weak redistribution mechanisms in the general budget of the Union failed to alleviate these tensions. The crisis in the euro area, incl. Greece's de facto bankruptcy, necessitates decisions such as state funding for banks, contrary to basic neoliberal rules. The subsequent policy of budgetary constraints by shifting the financial burden onto citizens dependent on state budgets brings about public distrust of European financial and political elites and contributes to the erosion of the dominant paradigm.

Europeanism suffers great damage from its identification with economic neoliberalism.

Worrying in the Pew research center's study below is the prevailing belief in France and Italy (major founding countries) that union membership is hurting their economies. This belief is linked to the strong positions of Eurosceptics there. (The case of Poland and Hungary will be discussed below.)

### Many people say EU membership has strengthened their national economies

% who say that in the long run, their country's overall economy has been \_\_ by the economic integration of Europe



Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey, Q14.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 3. Assessment of the benefits / harms for the national economy.

#### 4.2. Political Dimensions

Due to the connection with neoliberalism, Europeanism also suffers from foreign policy defeats: neoliberal interventionism (in interaction with the United States) yielded poor results in Yugoslavia (1999), incl. the recognition of Kosovo in 2008 and the support for the so-called Arab Spring (including Libya and Syria in 2011), as well as the provocation of the civil war in Ukraine in 2104. In none of these cases has liberal democracy been established on the "European model", with European countries on the list receiving only illusory hopes of joining the Union. At the same time, the appeal of the "European idea" in Turkey and Russia is virtually disappearing, replaced by a relationship of hidden or open alienation. Over the last 10 years, Europeanism has failed in its attempt to transform the EU's immediate environment in a positive way.

External failures are derived from internal ones - with the rise of neoliberalism in the late 20th and early 21st centuries the liberal notion of human rights expands with the right to experiment with the family and human nature. The imposition of individual human rights is at the expense of the individual's obligations to society, the nation-state as the supreme organization of that society is denied, and the supranational institutions of the EU are presented as its desired alternative. Indeed, the tendency to trust more the European Union than the national governments remains higher during the last 15 years but the gap is narrowing.

#### Positive views of Muslims more common in Western Europe and Russia

% who have a \_\_\_ opinion of Muslims in their country

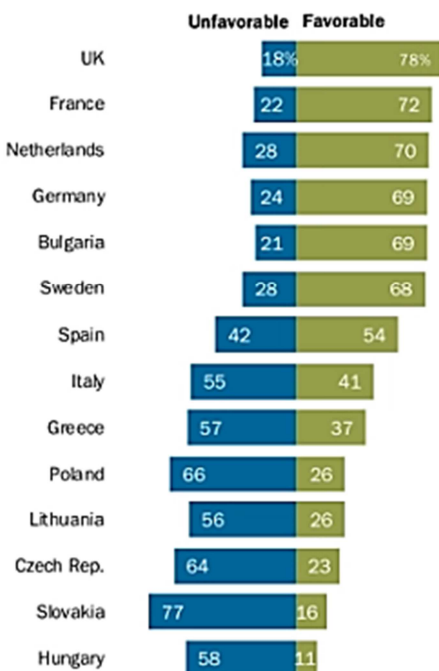


Figure 4. Attitudes towards Islam.

There is also one nuance: in Hungary and Poland, support for the EU is among the highest because of the above

awareness of the economic benefits of membership. But Poles and Hungarians (Czechs, Slovaks etc.) do not support a centralized EU imposing neoliberal policies on its members, but rather a union in which relatively independent states have the opportunity to defend their national interests. Here, too, the highest tensions in relation with these two countries are caused by the imposition of neoliberal values, models and policies - with regard to immigrants, religious and other minorities.

The enforcement of individual human rights for instance is based also on the doctrine of multiculturalism. In the EU, adherence to it is most evident in the two-time refusal at European Council level (2004 and 2008) to indicate the Christian roots of union in its treaty basis. Although the results of the implementation of this doctrine (including Islamic terrorism in Western Europe) forced German Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2010 to acknowledge that "multiculturalism has failed" (shortly afterwards, a similar recognition was made by the British Minister David Cameron [11]), the traditional European political elites don't change their attitude. And perceptions of Islam, for example continue to vary greatly from one Member State to another, as shown by the same Pew research center study:

As a result of these negative results, post-2008 neoliberal Europeanism has retreated, under attack from a still vague ideology, the anti-systemic, "populist" Euroscepticism that seeks to return political power from the EU's supranational institutions to the nation state [12]. The official ideology of the union responds to the challenge in a way that can be described as "more of the same" (in the declaration of the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission in Rome, 25.03.2017 [13].) At the same time in an attempt to organize some kind of "Counter-Reformation" in search of the lost loyalty, the European elite is trying to renew and supplement the ideological basis with one of the directions of the left-wing neoliberalism, namely "ecologism".

#### 5. "Ecologism" in Response to the Crisis

The economic basis of Europeanism with its inherent disregard for irrational attitudes of man introduces an additional complication: when a high level of material consumption is reached (the lower floor of Maslow's pyramid), people's motivation requires new stimuli other than material ones. A new "European cause" is needed, especially as the post-2008 turmoil calls into question fundamental tenets of EU ideology. That is why in the last few years Europeanism has been supplemented by an ingredient that claims to be scientific, but in fact highly irrational, named for convenience "ecologism" or "environmentalism". (More of the nature and the difference between the two terms see Harrison and Boyd. [14]) The ideological mixture thus formed must become the new basic paradigm for social development.

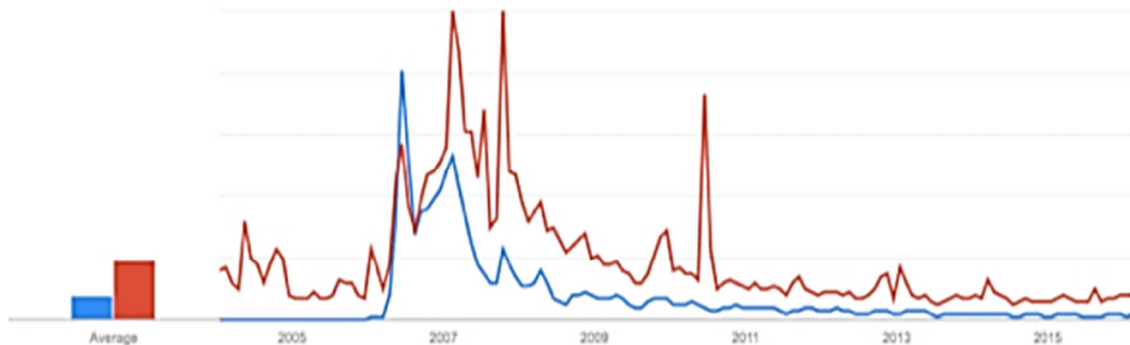
Ecologism, which has its roots in the 1970s, is a response to the search for a new common and abstract cause. The suggested danger of "global warming" (or the more vague and



less vulnerable to criticism cliché "climate change") is a continuation of the concerns about human impact on nature first uttered in the 1970s. The issue of man-made "global warming" was first raised in 1979, but the topic only gained momentum after the film *The Inconvenient Truth* (2006), starring US politician Al Gore. (The "End-of-the-World Forecast Models" are the result of a study of the Limits of Growth (1972) with the support of the Club of Rome, which linked temperature rise to carbon dioxide gases. With this methodology, forecasts are made for the population, resource depletion and pollution. The "forecast model" used by Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England, predicts that by

2050 global temperatures will rise by 1.5 degrees due to the presumed volumes of "greenhouse gas" in the atmosphere and requires a "transition to a carbon-free society". Real data, however, do not support Carney's prediction - See Evert, M. [15]) After years of discussions (which are still ongoing), the assumed danger of "global warming" was imposed by means of propaganda on global public opinion, incl. at the international political level.

The chart below shows the presence in the world media of the film (in blue) and of Al Gore himself (in red). Obviously, the topic alone does not receive enough propaganda support after the onset of the economic crisis.



**Figure 5.** Media coverage of Al Gore and his film.

Source: Brigitte Nerlich, 'An Inconvenient Truth': Exploring the dynamics of making climate change public, January 15, 2017, <https://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/makingsciencepublic/2017/01/15/an-inconvenient-truth-exploring-the-dynamics-of-making-climate-change-public/>

Following the ratification of the Paris Agreement in 2016, the European Union took the lead in the fight against "climate change", symbolized by the supported at highest political level activist Greta Thunberg. Judging by the chart below, she turns out to be more suitable for an advertising face of the campaign against global warming. Among her advantages are that she is European (from a country famous for its liberal politics), that she is a teenager (the future belongs to hers) and that she belongs to a specific minority group of people suffering from a rare neurological disease.

The ecological ingredient in Europeanism is very suitable for several reasons:

1) psychologically - "alarmism" in the theory of "global warming" is very well received by rich and "anxious" societies in France, Belgium and Germany. (Central, Southern and Eastern Europe are concerned about other issues they find more urgent.) At the same time, the need for joint action to "save the world" fits in well with Scandinavian solidarity culture, and a sense of world mission serves the globalists ambitions of the French political elite. (For the cultural peculiarities of Western European societies see Hofstede, also Minkov [16]) The failure of the multicultural model is forcing the elite to urgently seek an idea that unites EU citizens and gives a new understanding of integration. The irrationality of the belief in "global warming" makes its followers invulnerable to facts that refute it.

2) economically - the energy poverty of the union objectively worsens its competitiveness on the world market. The only significant energy reserve, coal, is unprofitable, and

anti-nuclear sentiment in several member states is difficult to change. The imposed EU Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), which in fact fines European industry for its carbon dioxide production, further increases the cost of production in the Union. In conditions of free competition, the EU loses market positions in favor of energy-rich countries and those that do not impose such self-restrictions, e.g. USA, Russia, Turkey. Forcing partners and competitors to abandon fossil fuels and imposing the same self-restrictions must eliminate their competitive advantages. Apart from that, the imposition of "green" energy technologies must enable the EU to make a new technological breakthrough and to gain (at least temporarily) a monopoly in order to maintain its leading position in the world economy. (Such is, for example, the experience of imposing energy-saving lamps under the pressure of European producers of light bulbs.)

Thus, the development of the EU ideology reflects the peculiarities of the transition to a new technological wave. However, the environmental component of Europeanism makes it highly vulnerable, both externally and internally - communities that have not reached a high level of consumption (there are such in the EU itself) are not ready to sacrifice their development goals without significant compensation, which is more and more problematic. The "greening" of integration has the potential to re-strengthen the internal cohesion among some member states around the so-called "Carolingian core", but this goes hand in hand with the danger of further isolating another part of them, still relying on coal energy. Apart from that, the economic

difficulties, incl. in the latest wave of crisis, accelerated by the pandemic, suppress one kind of irrational behavior in favour of another one.

And some of the goals and means of the "green policies" are in clear contradiction with technical and economic expediency. A study of D. Weißbach, G. Ruprechta, A. Huke, K. Czerski, S. Gottlieb, A. Hussein (2013) gives an idea of the biggest problem with alternative ("green") energy sources - their low energy efficiency [17]. The common indicator EROI (EROI = Energy Delivered / Energy Required to Deliver that Energy) is not in favour of these energy sources. Their use requires subsidies. The problem is that most EU countries have far exceeded their own debt ceilings: in 2020 government debt is up to 95.1% of GDP in euro area and up to 87.8% of GDP in EU [18]. (Allowed ceiling is 60%).

The imposition of environmental restrictions should increase the price of energy consumed, increase energy vulnerability, incl. to the external suppliers and should require protectionists trade measures. But the Union cannot impose tangible restrictions on external partners with greater economic and military-political weight simply because it does not have the necessary resources to do so.

## 6. Conclusion

Reality refutes the "scientific" mental constructions of European integration. The economic crisis of 2008 and the obvious helplessness of the traditional integration theories to handle it put the EU in ideological confusion. Neoliberalism seeks to strengthen the ideological basis of Europeanism by staggering to the extremes of environmental fundamentalism. The potential in this regard is significant insofar as the irrational belief in threats to nature and the urgency of "rescue" measures can remain unaffected for a long time by substantially reasonable objections. Nevertheless it remains vulnerable to technical and economic reality. The danger comes from the fact that the EU's partners and competitors may not follow the Union in the "green" self-restrictions it requires. Thus, the energetically poor, internally diverse and with unprotected external borders Union will lose its international weight and lose its image of a "catalytic state" (according to Brzezinski, 1997), as it will not be able to offer through Europeanism a new fascinating notion of social order.

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