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Theoretical and practical views of political integration in Central and Eastern Europe

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Abstract

The objective of the work was to analyze integration theories such as federalism, functionalism, neofunctionalism, the multilevel governance model and the interstate concept. Using the systemic-integral method, we analyze the main interpretations of modern integration models. The study also used special methods typical of international relations theory. The interstate concept is the most effective, because without denying the importance of integration, it focuses on the preservation of cultural and economic diversity. The experience of Poland, the Czech Republic, and the Baltic States, in particular Latvia, is a valuable integrating example for Ukraine. The results summarize that the countries analyzed received several advantages for the economic and military spheres through integration processes. It is concluded that in the experience of integration of the Balkans and the central-eastern countries, the importance of European integration processes is evident. The comparison of Ukraine and Latvia showed the importance of being a member of the North Atlantic Alliance for security guarantees and political

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consolidation. At the same time, the Czech Republic's accession to NATO has contributed to the reform and modernization of military affairs.

Keywords: integration theory; international relations; Eastern Europe; geopolitics; Central Europe.

Puntos de vista teóricos y prácticos de la integración política en Europa Central y del Este

Resumen

El objetivo del trabajo fue analizar teorías de integración como el federalismo, el funcionalismo, el neofuncionalismo, el modelo de gobernanza multinivel y el concepto interestatal. Utilizando el método sistémico-integral, analizamos las principales interpretaciones de los modelos modernos de integración. El estudio también utilizó métodos especiales típicos de la teoría de las relaciones internacionales. El concepto interestatal es el más eficaz, porque sin negar la importancia de la integración, se centra en la preservación de la diversidad cultural y económica. La experiencia de Polonia, la República Checa y los Estados bálticos, en particular Letonia, es un valioso ejemplo integrador para Ucrania. Los resultados resumen que los países analizados recibieron una serie de ventajas para las esferas económica y militar mediante procesos de integración. Se concluye que en la experiencia de integración de los Balcanes y de los países centro-orientales, se hace patente la importancia de los procesos de integración europea. La comparación de Ucrania y Letonia mostró la importancia de ser miembro de la Alianza del Atlántico Norte para las garantías de seguridad y la consolidación política. Al mismo tiempo, la adhesión de la República Checa a la OTAN ha contribuido a la reforma y modernización de los asuntos militares.

Palabras clave: teoría de integración; relaciones internacionales; Europa del este; geopolítica; Europa central.

Introduction

The development of modern politics is dominated by the processes of international integration and globalization. Political integration occupies a separate place in this system. It is the process of the convergence of two or more political structures that promote cooperation. In a narrower sense, political integration is a peculiar formation of a certain integral complex of political systems at the interstate level.

One of the manifestations of such integration is the process of unification of these structures. In this case, both formal and informal institutions are necessary for the joint solution of any issues. Modern experts prove that in an integrated society the degree of interaction between the participants of integration and the formation of common interests and values significantly improves.

The coverage of basic theories and concepts of political integration is an important experience for currently actively developing states, however, also for Ukraine. Despite this, the experience of Poland, the Czech Republic, and the Baltic states, particularly Latvia, are particularly valuable examples of Ukraine.

Although these countries, like Ukraine, were part of the Soviet Union and the Socialist Bloc, and after its collapse, they suffered several social, economic, and political problems, yet they successfully integrated into the European space. Thus, the purpose of our article is to highlight the main theories and concepts of political integration both theoretically and practically.

However, let us note that conceptually political theory does not act as a determinant of political decisions neither at the initial stage of formation of the main forms of integration nor today. On the other hand, political theoretical studies, the object of which is to study the evolution of integration, its components, and algorithms of action, are rather ambiguous.

1. Methods

The methodological basis of this study is the analysis of models of political integration. At the same time, general theoretical research methods, primarily synthesis, induction, and deduction, were used to cover the theoretical problem of the conceptual foundations of integration. As a result of applying the method of scientific abstraction, it was possible to move from unrelated judgments (theoretical concepts of integration) to specific conclusions (to the coverage of the practical implementation of integration models).

In addition, we used the historical method of research, which traced the development of the concepts of political integration in Central and Eastern Europe through the prism of historical changes. Comparativists' method is also important for our research, using which modern integration models are compared. In particular, the work reflects the main characteristics of the globalist, regional, sub-regional approaches. At the same time, using the systemic and holistic method, we have parsed the interpretation of modern integration models, highlighting the common features. We also used special methods of research of the theory of international relations.

Note that because of the development of integration processes in the world and the emergence of various integration associations, many theories and concepts of integration began to be actively developed and implemented. Both classical theories of international relations (in particular, realism, federalism, functionalism, etc.) and special concepts of integration (for example, multilevel governance or the theory of multilevel governance, the concept of confederation, the theory of global regionalism, etc.) were used when writing on the problem of integration.

In addition, the study of the European integration process applied a comprehensive approach, which in turn allows us to understand European integration as a holistic process with a characteristic internal development, highlighting the features of its qualitative features.

The theoretical part of our work is formed from the analysis of the works of the classics of political integration theory. In particular, the work presents the opinions of Mitrany (1966) and their conclusions about the model of a flexible integration concept. At the same time Haas (1976) through the prism of neo-functionalism analyzed the development of world integration processes. Hoffmann (2019) as a proponent of the interstate concept of political integration, characterized the possibilities of integration processes in the world.

The author defends the view of self-determination of nations as a source of differences between states. Of contemporary works, we should highlight the work of Bergmann (2018) who analyzed the peculiarities of the development of European integration through the lens of neo-functionalism analysis. Bielasiak (2019) analyzed integration challenges based on the analysis of contemporary transformational changes.

2. Results

Since the early 2000s, integration aspirations around the world have evolved and changed dynamically. At present, many different-level political blocs have been formed. Most of them have declared their main goal to reach the integration level of economic cooperation. We are talking primarily about such associations as the WTO, NEFTA, and the European Union.

At the same time, the problem of integration in the scientific-theoretical plane is, on the one hand, frequently mentioned in various contexts, and on the other hand, insufficiently investigated (especially given the shifting nature of the topic before the modern transformational challenges). In addition, the main ideas embedded in integration processes are often solely empirical in nature, without proper theoretical comprehension.

3. Peculiarities of the interpretation of the concept of integration in modern political science

The definition of the concept of integration was proposed and introduced into scientific circulation by the founder of structural functionalism, T. Parson. This researcher included two main components in this concept: internal compatibility of integration elements and maintenance of specific conditions. In some works, there is an opinion that integration is a complex process of interaction between states, denoted by two elements: economic essence and legal form (Bielasiak, 2019). As defined by the Oxford University Dictionary, integration is the specific act or process of two or more parts functioning together.

Thus, integration processes organized within an established system led to an increase in its integrity and organization. At the same time, different parts of integration may receive different levels of autonomy. Nelson (2019) believes that the term “integration” has implications for strengthening the interconnectedness and orderliness of individual parts of a social system.

At the same time, one of the well-known theorists of the non-functional approach to integration, E. Haas, defined it as “the process by which political actors... transfer their trust and political activity to another center whose institutions have a greater jurisdiction that goes beyond that previously existing in nation-states” (Haas, 2004: 34).

Other researchers explain the phenomenon of integration purely through the legal aspect. Thus, the development of integration processes is viewed through the prism of legal doctrine, which played a prominent role in assessing the extent of integration in the 1980s.

3.1. Theoretical-conceptual level of understanding political integration

Currently, there are several approaches to defining the concepts of integration in the professional literature. A division into globalist, regional, and subregional approaches is accepted. The first approach implies gradual comprehensive integration on both regional and global levels with the priority right of supranational structures.

In addition, a significant feature of this approach is the multicultural nature of society. Regional integration is the main form of integration, limited by territorial boundaries.

Vivid examples of regional integration processes are Western European models. They are represented in several concepts. In particular, federalism (or constitutionalism) is a theoretical approach to comprehending integration processes, established after World War II. This concept

became one of the basic theories of integration. This theory is based on the basic principle of federalism, highlighted by C. Wier, according to which sovereignty is divided between two territorially separated levels of government (Butorina, 2020). Integration formed according to this principle requires the formation of two levels of government (federal and state) - separated but working in a coordinated way.

Another approach is the multifunctional approach. It is based on a conceptual understanding of the phenomenon of integration. According to the supporters of this concept, world integration is inevitable, because it is caused by modern economic modernization.

At the same time, neo-functionalists believe that integration needs cannot be based solely on economic interests. In their view, the economic part of integration matters only for the achievement of the higher goal - political integration. The founder of the direction of neo-functionalism is E. Haas. He defined this concept as spillover (Haas, 1976). Consequently, according to it, integration processes should gradually spread from one sphere to another through the interdependence of different processes within the center.

According to neo-functionalism, the integration of states should start from the economic sphere, but by developing cooperation in this sphere, its participants gradually extend it to other spheres. It is a question of social, cultural, legal, and other areas of human activity. A valuable example of applying neo-functionalism in practice can be the process of gradual involvement of the former socialist camp countries into the European integration center (Haas, 2004).

The point is that first the European Economic Union (EEC) and the states of Central and Eastern Europe concluded multilateral agreements on trade and cooperation and then switched to associate membership. This resulted in their inclusion in the European Union.

The theory of “flexible integration” was developed by both French and British politicians. It became especially popular after the 1970s when Britain, Ireland, and Denmark joined the EU. According to the general concept of “flexible integration,” each state has a different degree of integration aspirations. At the same time, the British vision of this concept is somewhat different. J. Major, the British Prime Minister described the main foundations of the British vision of this concept. Behind him the main idea is that European integration should expand rather than deepen, respectively, the European Union should have more flexibility (Mitrany, 2006). At the same time, this politician proposed to give EU members the right to choose and decide in which EU projects they will participate.

The third approach is the interstate concept, which emerged in the 1960s and was the main rival of the functional theory of integration. This

approach is guided by supporters of state-centered views on the processes of international cooperation. Well-known representatives of this concept are such scientists as S. Hoffman, E. Haas, E. Moravchyk. The basis of this theory is the understanding of the principle of self-determination of nations as a source of differences between states.

According to the representatives of this approach, integration is a pluralistic phenomenon that depends on various factors. S. Hoffmann concluded that states enter into regional associations primarily through transformational processes on the world stage (Hoffmann, 2019). A vivid example of the realization of this concept is the reorientation of the former socialist states in the late 1980s.

Recently the fourth concept has also become popular. It is a model of multilevel management. It is actively implemented and developed by such scientists as C. Blank and L. Haug. According to this concept, there are many levels of government in the political world, where a special interaction of political forces takes place.

At the same time, as a result of the development of the EEC and its transformation in the early 1990s, the EU deepened and expanded integration. Thus, new integration concepts emerged. Their authors were mostly socio-political figures and European officials who reflected in them the new realities of the unification process. Let us recall such modern theories as the “hardcore” theory of W. Schäuble and C. Clamers, the “confederation” theory of F. Mitterrand.

W. Schäuble, a German politician, later Minister of Finance, proposed the “hardcore” theory. Proponents of this concept believe that the development of the EU should be based on federalism and systemicism (Macrae, 2016). At the same time, the main core should consist of powerful European states (in particular, Germany and France). In addition, W. Schäuble suggests introducing long transition periods for Central and Eastern European countries wishing to integrate into the EU. Former French President F. Mitterrand proposed the theory of “confederation”.

It became widespread in the late 1990s. This concept also suggested that a “solid core” (a group of the most developed countries ready to deepen integration processes) should be singled out within the European Union).

Many proponents have the concept of confederation as the basis of the EU’s integration potential. Thus, a large number of publications on the structure of even the modern EU indicate its federal and confederal roots (Butorina, 2020). The comparison with confederation can be considered quite relevant because we are talking about a loose union of states united by common goals. At the same time, the autonomy of these states is not questioned, so this arrangement should satisfy all participants of the EU enlargement.

Proponents of the confederal model of interstate cooperation encounter certain problems in their theoretical conclusions. In particular, a confederation is a temporary formation, which aims to implement a common goal (usually a military alliance, a trade union, etc.). Modern super-state formations do not have primary sovereignty; moreover, the purpose of their creation is not temporary and generally theoretical (Macrae, 2016). Accordingly, this concept will still require further reflection.

3.2. Political Integration of the Baltic and Central European Countries: Experience for Ukraine

For Ukraine, as an Eastern European democratic state, the most valuable experience is that of the Baltic states, which are now integrated into the structures of the European Union and NATO. For example, Latvia, like Ukraine, was a part of the Soviet Union, and after its collapse, it received a number of social, economic, and political problems.

We believe that the country's successful integration has occurred due to a number of factors, chief among which are the stability factor (political consolidation), economic cooperation, and military integration. In particular, the constancy of political relations in the country helped Latvia gain EU membership.

Ukraine in recent years has also been declaring an unchanged European vector of development, but in practice, political instability has led to severe manipulation within the state. Today they are exacerbated by the hybrid war with the Russian Federation and the temporary loss of control over Crimea (Mereniuk and Mereniuk, 2019). Under such conditions, it is extremely difficult to reach a socio-political consensus, although sympathizers of Ukraine's European future have significantly increased because of Russian aggression.

In Latvia during the 1990s, one can trace a rather active change of governments, but the main direction of the country's foreign policy remained the same. This country is a member of the WTO, as well as Ukraine. Accession to the WTO demonstrates the globalization of trade and economic relations and interstate cooperation.

At the same time, Ukraine and Latvia are integrated into the European Free Trade Association. Although the growth rate of the Ukrainian economy is slow for objective reasons, it is quite optimistic in a global perspective. Accordingly, economic cooperation can become an important basis for strengthening cooperation between Ukraine and the EU.

An important aspect is a military cooperation. Latvia is a member of NATO. This creates a certain aura of stability and confidence not only for the society and political elite but also for investors and entrepreneurs.

Belonging to this military-political bloc is an important achievement of the Baltic country. In Ukraine, discussions about NATO membership have been going on since the 1990s. Neither government officials nor North Atlantic Alliance officials have long been able to establish specific markers for further cooperation (Kostiukevych *et al.*, 2020). Only with the outbreak of military aggression in eastern Ukraine and Crimea did the understanding of missed opportunities emerge.

However, even today in the Ukrainian society there is a considerable layer of those who perceive Ukraine's integration aspirations negatively. Although the percentage of such citizens is decreasing, it creates opportunities (along with a direct military threat from Russia) for further stalling of integration processes.

At the same time, a fairly good example, proving the prospects of the pro-European vector of the integration process of Ukraine is Poland. Like Ukraine, Poland is also a post-socialist state, and at the same time, these two countries had approximately the same starting opportunities at the beginning of transformational changes. In addition, these states used to have similar polarized political systems and economic structures.

However, for a long period, they developed in different ways. At present, Poland, back in the late twentieth century. In comparison with Ukraine, Poland has achieved significant economic achievements since the beginning of the twentieth century. It should be noted that from the period of Poland's inclusion in the EU, the country's economic growth has noticeably accelerated, and the rate of GDP increase was higher than the average European indicator in some periods (Picek, 2020).

At the same time, Poland's experience contradicts the claim that accession to the EU immediately leads to a decrease in trade with Eastern countries. Since Poland acceded to the EU, exports to the Asian region have increased significantly.

Despite this, after Poland acceded to the EU, the problem of unemployment has not been completely solved. Modern experts attribute Poland's high unemployment rate to a false policy of eliminating the coal and steel industries, which in turn led to heavy engineering (Nelson, 2019). This happened under the pressure of the EU's strict ecological foundations, which began to be practiced after the accession of the republic to the union.

Despite this, Poland's integration into the EU correlates with significant improvements in most indicators of the country's socio-economic sector. Such results have been achieved primarily due to the benefits offered by Poland's membership in the European Union (Picek, 2020). The opportunities significant economic benefits are the direct subsidies received by Poland within the framework of two priorities of the European Union.

It is a policy of equalization and support for agriculture. Apart from these subsidies, we can consider an increase in specific foreign investments (and not an increase in the repatriation of capital in Ukraine) as a practical benefit from joining the EU. We should note that 90 % of investments in Poland come from European and American companies (their joining the state is caused by the integration of the country into the common economic space system).

Thus, we believe that the process of Poland's integration into the EU was successful as a result of its demonstration of systematic and strong-willed actions, regardless of who led the country. Despite this, let us note that the accession to the European integration space became real also due to a progressive understanding of civil society, a positive attitude to the integration of trade unions, various non-governmental organizations, churches (Bielasiak, 2019). In addition, an important factor was the support of leading European countries, especially Germany and France.

In addition to European integration aspirations, Poland also has a separate cooperation treaty with the United States. Poland is also a strategic partner of the United States on the continent - there is not only cooperation between the states at the level of NATO, but also at the level of state relations.

The experience of the Czech Republic and Slovakia is a striking example of political integration. As a result of the collapse of the socialist bloc, the Euro-Atlantic and European integration of the Czech Republic and Slovakia are defined as the main priorities of the countries' national development.

It is worth mentioning that the Czech Republic applied for EU membership back in 1996 and was officially admitted to the union in 2004. Since then, the Czech Republic, as an EU member state, has been persistently involved in the implementation of leading parts of the EU's main program, primarily the Joint Foreign and Security Policy (JFDP) and the Eastern Partnership program. Within the JFDP, the Czech Republic, together with other EU member states, participated in international peacekeeping operations, the formation of European military tactical groups, etc.

We can consider the formation of basic prerequisites for the country's economic development to be a notable result of the Czech Republic's accession to the EU. One of the important factors in the Czech Republic's integration into the EU was its accession to the Schengen area. In 1999 the Czech Republic became a full member of NATO. At the same time, unlike the Baltic States, Romania, and Poland the main objective of this accession was not so much to guarantee the protection from Russia, but primarily the possibility to implement the potential of the Alliance to optimize the defense component of the Czech Republic.

Thus, as a result of Czech integration into NATO Czech military forces were reduced and a significant number of outdated weapons was decommissioned. Since 2005 Czech Army fully shifted to the contract principle. The reduction of the Czech armed forces not only saved a lot of money but also led to the inclusion of the country into the NATO Cooperative Security system. Besides, the Czech Republic needs to receive from NATO new modern weapons and military equipment. We believe that the Czech accession to the EU and NATO is a consistent and logical step, which provided the Czech Republic with progress in many spheres, primarily social, political, economic, and military.

2. Discussion

Modern globalization processes entail a wide interest among political theorists concerning the fate of future integration processes. We believe that this is not surprising, because, throughout history, states as separate political mechanisms have sought allies for the realization of common interests. In the Middle Ages, countries sought cooperation at the dynastic level, relying on dynastic marriages (Parshyn, 2018).

In modern times, interstate alliances joined this, the existence of which was active until the end of World War II. In 1945, the United Nations was created, and a short time later the formation of the EU began. Attempts to solve problems, particularly economic ones, jointly led to the emergence of super-state structures, a new trend in world political science (Sharma, 2021). Accordingly, contemporary scholarly debates continue not around the question of the necessity/unnecessity of integration, but regarding the optimal form of its implementation.

We believe that the model of interstate interaction remains quite promising. In particular, the credo “unity in diversity” is gradually becoming defined in modern Europe. This motto is perceived by the strongest players in modern politics - Germany and France. They are followed by other countries as well. Let us note that the broad interest in the regional peculiarities of politics and culture contributes to the fact that “lesser” countries take their rightful place in integration projects. This way is quite promising in terms of attracting new participants.

Modern political integration processes in Europe are not separated from the establishment of cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance (Panova *et al.*, 2021). The Ukrainian experience indicates that in the current situation in Eastern Europe, political struggle and direct military aggression can hinder democratic processes and accession to the circle of other developed democracies. To avoid such challenges, the best option would be simultaneous integration into NATO structures, i.e., joining the politico-military alliance.

The Ukrainian authorities and society were not ready for such steps for a long time, for this reason, the circumstances are not in favor of the state, which finds itself in a difficult situation and under conditions of occupation of part of the territories (Merenuik and Merenuik, 2019). This negative experience should be indicative, important for understanding modern political processes.

It is difficult to predict the possible disintegration of European structures. After the UK leaves the EU as a result of Brexit, other countries may follow suit.

In particular, the Hungarian government's recent statement hides the prospect of leaving the single European political body (Macrae, 2016; Kolb *et al.*, 2021). We believe, however, that these crisis phenomena are temporary, but a new vector for the active development of integration processes in Europe will be the Balkan countries, which will already participate in the unification processes as independent countries.

We believe that serious challenges to the further strengthening of European integration will be the continuation of hybrid aggression by the Russian Federation, negative economic phenomena (recession due to the COVID-19 pandemic, etc.), and social tension (due to the emigration crisis). At the same time, the elimination of territorial contradictions and open military conflicts between the participants will be positive aspects of the integration processes. The primacy obtained by diplomatic methods of interaction is also an important "integration" achievement. Because of this favorable political atmosphere, integration projects, also including the EU, will receive a new impetus to further movement.

Conclusions

Contemporary processes of globalization pose questions to political scientists about the most effective ways of political integration. But it is not even a question of whether or not associations are necessary at all. Let us note that as of today there are several concepts of political integration. Among them, we will distinguish federalist, functional, multilevel governance model and interstate concept. We consider the latter to be the most effective because it is focused on the preservation of cultural diversity. Let us note that the formation of these paradigms took place during the XIX-XX centuries when the question of the formation of separate political interstate and supranational associations became acute.

The modern EU is evolving from interstate to a supranational association. At the same time, the principles of federalism (or the idea of building a pan-European America) have recently found much less support

than before. Probably it is about the problems of coexistence of different ethnic groups, which the U.S. authorities have faced to a much lesser extent - emigrants here settled sporadically (although, for example, within certain urban neighborhoods), whereas in Europe we are talking about cooperation between full-fledged ethnic groups that have lived on their land for centuries. Although there were precedents of disintegration as early as the 1990s (the breakup of Czechoslovakia), in the future the countries were united within the EU based on equal rights of nations. We believe that the next enlargement of the EU will take place at the expense of the Balkan countries, which will also become part of it as separate nations.

At the same time, even at the current stage of integration processes, some countries also return to individual interstate agreements. For example, Poland has concluded cooperation agreements with the United States, which creates an original center of influence in Europe. Similarly, all European countries are members of NATO. For Ukraine and its integration aspirations, these ties must be taken into account.

Destabilizing activities of the Russian Federation threaten Eastern Europe, but the countries' NATO membership blocks all Kremlin attempts to sow discord so far. At the same time, the comparison of Ukraine and Latvia demonstrated the importance of being part of the North Atlantic Alliance for security guarantees and the importance of political consolidation within the country. Now it is difficult for Ukraine to resist aggression because the long period of political uncertainty has not resulted in necessary and timely reforms.

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