

REVIEW OF MATTEO SCOTTO, *FRAGILE ORDERS.*
UNDERSTANDING INTERGOVERNMENTALISM IN THE CONTEXT
OF EU CRISES AND REFORM PROCESS,
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The 21st century has been a turbulent time for the European Union with several crises (sovereign debt, migration, Brexit, covid, ...), raising the spectre of a disintegration of the EU. In his book, *Fragile orders. Understanding Intergovernmentalism in the Context of EU Crises and Reform Process*, Matteo Scotto, the director of the research department of Villa Vigoni, the German-Italian Centre for the European Dialogue based in Italy, refers to a fragile European Union, going back to the Latin origins of fragile (“frangere”, to break). The fundamental question is then what the real cause is of this fragility. According to Scotto, the “modern popular discourse in favour of European integration largely considers intergovernmentalism in the EU as the main cause of its disintegration” (p. 7). In his view, intergovernmentalism “refers to the method of integration that bases Member States’ decisions on unanimity and not on majority voting” (p. 7). Scotto comes out clearly in favour of intergovernmentalism, “today, the inter-state bargaining represents the only catalyst for possible EU progress” (p. 8).

The book is composed of four chapters: “The legacy of intergovernmentalism in the European integration process”, “The two sides of integration: Core State Powers and sovereignty in the European Union”, “EU reform: Ratio, rules and methods old and new”, and “The relation between intergovernmentalism and the member states in the context of the EU reform process”.

In the first chapter, “The legacy of intergovernmentalism in the European integration process”, Scotto goes into the legacy of intergovernmentalism in today’s European integration process. He argues that Next Generation

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EU (NGEU), the EU's response to the covid pandemic, showed the effectiveness of the intergovernmental method. "Both in terms of policy and politics, the NGEU is a prime example of how inter-state bargaining can also lead to effective solutions at the European level" (p. 9). He further brings an overview of the theory and significance of intergovernmentalism in the European Union.

The concepts of core state powers and sovereignty are at the heart of the second chapter, "The two sides of integration: Core State Powers and sovereignty in the European Union". Scotto pays quite some attention to the Maastricht Treaty. In his view, the Maastricht Treaty "has meant reorganizing and deepening the cooperation in many policy fields, without shifting the level of decision-making on a vertical axis, i.e. towards supranational institutions" (p. 66). I'm a bit surprised that he gives not so much attention to the monetary union aspect of the Maastricht Treaty (maybe, as a former central banker, I'm a bit biased in my attention to this area). Monetary union implied the transfer of monetary sovereignty to a new supranational European institution, the European Central Bank, an important and delicate issue, certainly in Germany.¹ Moreover, the currency has always been an important (national) symbol and EMU implied also significant changes in some countries, like the independence of the Banque de France (Maes and Péters 2021).²

With chapter three, "EU reform: Ratio, rules and methods old and new", Scotto, provides an overview of the treaty reforms in the European Union, from Maastricht to Lisbon (which formally recognized the European Council). As Scotto observes, "the stages of the various treaties show how the formal reform process of the EU is underpinned by permanent inter-state bargaining" (p. 136). He also goes into the informal process of reform outside the EU legal order, with three emblematic cases of inter-governmental treaties (regarding the Fiscal Compact, the European Stability Mechanism and the Single Resolution Fund). In a last section he pays attention to the Conference on the Future of Europe.³

¹ Concerning the ECB, Scotto (p. 67) mentions the reluctance of the Member States to give more powers to the Commission. However, in his discussion of the monetary dimension of the Maastricht Treaty, the role of the central bankers is not so much discussed.

² I was a bit surprised at Scotto's argument that "For many years the history of European integration has overlooked the very close link between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Maastricht Treaty" (p. 60). I rather thought that this has been quite discussed in the literature (MAES 2002).

³ Scotto also discusses two earlier initiatives, the Conference of Messina and the Convention on the Future of Europe, which were important for the Rome Treaties and the Lisbon Treaty. I'm a bit surprised that he does not really discuss the Delors Committee which was important in the preparation of the Maastricht Treaty.

In a last chapter, “The relation between intergovernmentalism and the member states in the context of the EU reform process” Scotto focuses on the relationship between intergovernmentalism and the Member States. He goes into the state transformation which is taking place in the EU and analyses the rationale behind preferences of the Member States for intergovernmentalism or federalism. In the introduction, Scotto argues that, “this chapter definitively absolves intergovernmentalism of the sin of European disintegration” (p. 11).

Scotto’s book is based on his PhD in Political Science at the University of Bonn. It is very much based on a review of the existing literature. As far as I could see, there was not much archival work or interviews. As for the future of the European Union, a new enlargement, with Ukraine, as well as several other countries, is more and more coming on the agenda. It will be interesting to see how the EU will prepare for this new potential enlargement. As Scotto observes, “the current EU27 has never undertaken a real treaty reform process” (p. 108). It will be a new test for intergovernmentalism.

REFERENCES

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- MAES I. and PÉTERS S. 2021, “Interview of Jacques de Larosière: In Search of a Better World Financial Order”, *History of Economic Thought and Policy*, 2: 91-132. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3280/SPE2021-002005> (accessed November 19, 2024).