



# THE PERSPECTIVES OF NEO-MEDIEVALLY UNITED EUROPE

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the analysis of various trends in European integration. Describing the ongoing transition to federalisation, it clarifies the main reasons for the rise of Euroscepticism in member countries of the European Union and discusses the potential consequences of a withdrawal from the block, particularly the ones associated with Brexit. Following that, the report introduces the notion of neo-medievalism, explains some of its fundamental aspects and proposes an alternative integration policy plan involving the mentioned concept.

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## 1. Introduction

United Europe has always been not only a dream widely shared by such historically significant figures as Charlemagne and Napoleon Bonaparte but also an aspiration common for the continental nations tired of wars and striving for peace. However, once the lifetime opportunity to unite the Europeans under one flag eventually appeared on the horizon in 1992, the year when the three European Communities were transformed into the European Union in accordance with the Maastricht Treaty, many people became anxious about the future of their cultural identities as well as national and economic sovereignties. The idea of the rising superstate turned out to be quite divisive and has been causing heated debates across the continent. For this reason, the process of further integration has ultimately slowed down (Titievskaja, Kononenko, Navarra, Stamegna, & Zume, 2020).

How could it happen that the long-lasting dream of “unity in diversity”<sup>1</sup> turned out to be an utterly complicated issue, leading some people to reject even the existing status quo, let alone further perspectives for unification? What are the reasons behind some of these concerns and are they indeed detrimental to the idea of United Europe? Or maybe the problem lies in the false approach adopted by the politicians and there is an alternative way to achieve the goal, providing an all-embracing compromise to both proponents and opponents of federalisation?

This paper focuses on some aspects of European integration as well as the arguments for and against it. Furthermore, it analyses the concept of neo-medievalism as a promising approach to reforming the European Union into a federation. Assessing its benefits and drawbacks, the authors thoroughly discuss the reasons why this policy line would be a better way out of the brewing political crisis than the dissolution of the EU. Besides, the paper proposes concrete steps to undertake, in order to unite Europe in accordance with the concept of neo-medievalism.

## 2. Background: European Integration

The origins of the European Union date back to the end of World War II, which made visible the need for neighbouring countries to build unity by strengthening their cooperation. European Integration was initiated in 1951 when the six founding members, namely Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and West Germany, created the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), through which a common market for steel and coal was created.

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<sup>1</sup> “In Varietate Concordia” (or “United in Diversity”) has been the official motto of the European Union since 2000.

Later, the Treaty of Rome of 1957 established the European Economic Community (EEC), through which a common market based on the free movement of goods, people, services, and capital strived was initiated. Further, as candidate countries progressively became eligible, the European Communities enlarged between 1973 and 1986, leading up to the Maastricht Treaty, which was originally signed by 12 members in 1992 and laid the foundations for the European Union as it is known today. The higher level of greater cooperation was achieved by various means, particularly through the introduction of European citizenship by which citizens could reside and move amongst Member states freely, the alignment of justice and common affairs to ensure security of Europeans, the establishment of a common foreign and security policy with the aim of safeguarding EU common values, fundamental interests and independence, the commitment to economic integration by establishing the Euro-currency and its associated convergence criteria to ensure price stability, as well as further pledging for integration through following common budgetary policies and assisting others on the event of economic hardship (European Central Bank, 2021).

Since 1992, three further treaties have been signed, making modifications to EU regulatory frameworks in preparation for possible membership enlargements. Indeed, the European Union currently includes 27 states, accounting for 8 percent of the world's population and 40 percent of the world's trade in goods (Dedman, 2010). After more than 50 years of existence, only 1 pre-member has left compared to the 8 states<sup>2</sup> that want to join, viewing the EU as a success story invites a multi-perspective approach.

When considering the advantages of the EU, research highlights the economic benefits arising from the borderless single market which allows the free movement of goods, capital, people, and services, as well as the exchange of data, knowledge and information (Pilati & Zuleeg, 2020). Indeed, the single market reduces trade barriers, thereby fostering competition and yielding efficiency gains, increasing members' trade flows, GDP and employment. Studies indicate that all member states benefit substantially from this, having as high as 23 percent of their total employment linked to it (Schultz, 2018) and their GDPs being on average 8.7 percent higher (Pilati & Zuleeg, 2020). Whilst it is true that the bloc also has international non-EU trade agreements, arguably, it is the prior European Integration into a single market which has allowed for success in trade affairs. Member States act as a collective body which represents

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<sup>2</sup> Current EU Candidate countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.

one of the world's largest export markets, granting it an incomparable bargaining position, which single member states would have lacked.

While the economic benefits are clear, further advantages, for instance, consumer protection, employment, as well as health and work standards, arise from the EU. As an example, free movement of labour decreases the risk of bottlenecks in industries with labour shortages, exemplifying a clear positive externality, since work-seeking EU citizens can be allocated to positions where their skills can create the largest return, thereby improving productivity. Additionally, EU laws provide common norms for the protection of workers, placing minimum requirements regarding their health and safety.

On the other hand, it is clear that the expansion of the European Union has not come without affecting member countries. The scholarly debate sometimes argues that sustaining European economic growth and prosperity is at the expense of the economically stronger states (such as Germany, France, and priorly also the UK), which pull less developed countries. This issue became starkly visible when the EU faced the 2008-2009 Great Recession and subsequent debt crisis, which was particularly pronounced for the peripheral members such as Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Cyprus (Szczepanski, 2019), requiring bailout packages to preserve the solvency of at-risk euro-zone members. Incidentally, monetary integration is perceived as the most limiting aspect, as it seizes the possibility for Eurozone members to conduct independent monetary policy, instrumental for effective crisis mitigation. Paradoxically, integration further implies that the localised negative shocks, which impact the Euro, are unavoidably transferred to other states, potentially resulting in macroeconomic instability for some member countries (Szczepanski, 2019).

Several additional issues stand out, yet the main being the possible loss of sovereignty and long-established national identities, especially in light of the European Union extensive involvement in political rather than economic realms. Indeed, as described by McLaren (2004), “the elimination of national currencies, coordination of asylum and immigration policies and the creation of a European military force, integration is beginning to appear less and less economic in nature”. Precisely, not only does the extensive binding European regulatory framework increase the bureaucratic burden, but it also leaves states with limited manoeuvre regarding national issues, which tends to treat situations with a “one size fits all” approach, underestimating the local specificities (Green Cowles et al., 2000). It becomes apparent how integration is contingent on the particular factors which are sensible for member states with a

key reference to the “goodness of fit” between EU policies and national institutions (Geddes, 2001).

Undoubtedly, the last two decades have been turbulent waters for the EU, with each crisis calling for the revision of the institutional design of the bloc to better adapt to the current changes. Indeed, the concern about its uncertain future has characterised a vivid debate impelling the European Union into a reform where “both federal and regional States are calling for a new era of fiscal federalism” (Alber & Valdescalici, 2012, p.325). The question arises as to whether the EU will further integrate or alternatively, foster independence of member states, ultimately leading to the fall of the bloc. The eminence of the future transition of the Union has been reflected at different levels of the public eye. European Commission President José Manuel Barroso and European Parliament President Martin Schulz plead in favour of further EU integration, arguing the importance to act as one in face of increasing global challenges such as climate change and economic crises. As expressed by Schulz (2017), a cohesive EU should coexist with the conservation of diverse European identities: “I hope to experience the United States of Europe first-hand someday. This has nothing to do with giving up national identities”. Furthermore, the French President Emmanuel Macron has been publicly vocal on his insistence of a united Europe which could defend itself with a “European army”. Having said that, whilst there are numerous proponents of a further European integration, the increasingly important role of British reservations and Euroscepticism make the future direction unclear.

### **3. The Problem: The Rise Of Euroscepticism**

In the early 2000s an opposite ideological trend presented by the so-called Eurosceptics arose on the political scene of Europe (Brack & Startin, 2015), viewing integration as a process which leads to the loss of national sovereignty, cultural unification, destruction of regional identities and economic unsustainability. Taking such a perspective, the political image of Brussels, the capital of the EU, is gradually transformed into a faceless but powerful enemy of the “independent European nations”, depriving states of their right for self-determination (Kopecky & Mudde, 2002).

For some time, Euroscepticism remained a rather extreme position shared by various radical political groups, such as the UK Independence Party in Britain and Northern League in Italy. This started to change in two directions with, firstly, the migrant crisis in 2015 (Stockemer, Niemann, & Speyer, 2019) and, secondly, Brexit in 2016 (Banks, 2016).

The first event has been associated with the surge in street crime figures, sexual harassment cases and terrorist attacks as well as with the rise of predominantly Muslim communities, having religious and social norms which are sometimes contradictory with the local legislation, notably in terms of the women's and LGBTQ+ rights (Stockemer, Niemann, & Speyer, 2019). This has unleashed the potentials of cultural nationalism, having led to a significant increase in popularity of numerous far-right parties, accusing the EU's authorities of irresponsibility, and their subsequent victories in regional and general elections (Larsen, Cutts, & Goodwin, 2019). Apart from this, it has also strengthened the positions of already governing Eurosceptic forces in Hungary and Poland, two countries, which the authors refer to a few lines below.

The second event, namely Brexit, arguably had a more complex nature, encompassing national, social and economic factors. Many prominent politicians from the Conservative Party, which has been a driving force in the process of the UK's withdrawal from the EU, have been supporters of neoliberal Thatcherism and, for this reason, have been describing Brexit as a prerequisite for economic freedom and, thus, an opportunity to introduce a more market-oriented policy line (Institute of Economic Affairs, 2021). Moreover, nostalgic sentiments, expressed, for example, in such words as "good old days when we did things *'our way'*" (Dakers, 2016), were also present to some extent in the political campaigns. Besides, a few "continental" mottos, related to public security and national culture, have also found their place in the speeches made by Boris Johnson, Jacob Rees-Mogg, Nigel Farage and other well-known politicians of the United Kingdom (Sobolewska & Ford, 2020).

In the east of Europe, a few countries, namely Hungary and Poland, having chosen to stay in the EU, have still managed to challenge the authority of Brussels. Or, put it otherwise, from the perspective of Hungarian and Polish officials, it was Brussels which challenged the authority of local governments. Both were claimed to violate EU law. For instance, Hungary was accused of breaking the binding block's rules, related to the asylum seekers, media freedom and LGBTQ+ rights (Bayer, 2022). Likewise, the Polish Constitutional Tribunal ruled that the national constitution takes precedence over the European legislation, which was interpreted as an illegal motion (Camut, 2023). These cases led the European Commission to launch an action against both countries and subsequently sanction them by cutting funding. As a consequence, Hungarian (2022) and Polish (2021) authorities were quick to claim that the EU is abusing power, trying to impose undemocratic will on independent nation states.

Needless to say, all those events have raised many sensitive political and socio-economic questions, significantly slowing down the process of European integration. It is highly unlikely



that there will be any progress possible in this direction until the issues are properly resolved. For this reason, in order to find a solution, it is important to understand the common reason behind the problems mentioned.

In the case at hand, issues arguably appear to be linked to the increasing level of bureaucratic centralism, which allows the executive and governing institutions of the EU to make certain decisions concerning economy, immigration, security, climate change, etc., sometimes seemingly contradicting the goals and interests of local citizens and governments. Even if the EU's influence is rhetorically exaggerated by the Eurosceptics, its current image still leaves space for a rather negative judgement regarding the abuse of power by European officials. The question is whether dissolving the EU would indeed be such an effective and efficient way to combat bureaucratic centralism or it would be just an illusory solution.

#### **4. The Historical Challenge: Looking For Solution**

As it could be concluded from above, many politicians and their audiences have seen the solution in abandoning European integration altogether and subsequently exiting from the EU, re-establishing full national sovereignty. So far, there was only one withdrawal from the EU in its whole history, namely Brexit. This has been a very complicated process, both politically and economically, which has polarised British society and led to the far-reaching consequences. It took approximately four years to be officially completed, during which was extensively covered by both British and international media. Hence, it might be sensible to use Brexit as a comparative model, based on which predictions and conclusions with respect to other countries can be made. The question at hand is whether such a withdrawal would solve the previously mentioned problems, or it would be a pure illusion of the solution.

Firstly, one of the main arguments proposed by the so-called Brexiteers was economic independence from the EU. Indeed, in 2022, soon after Boris Johnson stepped down as a prime minister, his successor Liz Truss and Chancellor of the Exchequer Kwasi Kwarteng, both Brexiteers and prominent Thatcherites (Casalicchio & Blanchard, 2022), tried to implement supply-side economic model through extensive tax cuts, reduction of government regulation and introduction of a mini budget (Pope, 2022). However, their policies have completely failed due to the reaction of markets, having provoked a financial crisis (Thomas, 2022). Almost all economically liberal reforms were cancelled soon afterwards. In just over a month of his chancellorship, Kwarteng was replaced by Jeremy Hunt, whilst Liz Truss resigned a few days later to be succeeded by Rishi Sunak. The new Conservative cabinet has adopted a

comparatively more paternalist line than its predecessors, having reversed tax cuts and increased the tax burden (Morton, 2022). In other words, in spite of Brexit, Britain had no other option but to return to a more regulatory policy, even under the rule of the same party which had once contributed to its withdrawal from the EU to ensure more economic independence.

Secondly, numerous promises have been made concerning the control of irregular immigration to the UK. Nevertheless, the number of people coming illegally to Great Britain has been steadily increasing with insignificant fluctuations in the period between 2020 and 2022 and, what is more, even at the faster rate than in the previous years, prior to Brexit (Government of the United Kingdom, 2022). For example, as it can be seen from the graph below, in October 2019 the number of people per small boat arriving to the UK was equal to 10, whilst the number of boats was about 20. In January 2022, a number of refugees per boat peaked at 35, whilst the number of boats increased to 80. On the contrary, many countries, which chose to stay in the EU but adopted a stricter asylum policy, such as Denmark, Sweden and Italy, have already achieved some impressive results, effectively combating illegal immigration. Hence, even from the nationalist point of view, withdrawal from the block did not solve the problem.

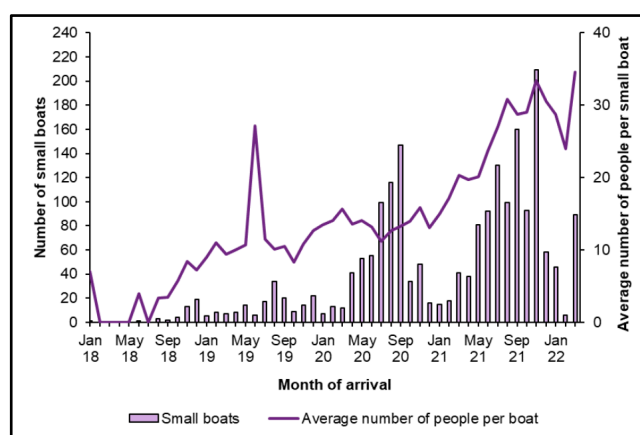


Figure 1: Number of small boats and average number of people per small boat coming to the United Kingdom, from January 2018 to March 2022, retrieved from GOV.uk

More examples of the ineffectiveness of Brexit could be introduced and discussed. However, even from those described above it becomes obvious that the populist claims have distorted and oversimplified the reality. The modern age apparently requires less straightforward and more careful as well as time-consuming solutions, even if they do not initially seem to be appealing to the voters due to the general level of complexity. One of these potential solutions will be extensively covered in the next few sections of the paper.

## 5. The Solution: Introduction to Neo-Medievalism

These days the age of increasing globalisation is more and more often compared with the mediaeval period of European history (Lewicki, 2017). The first comparisons were drawn already in the first half of the XX century by a prominent Russian thinker Nikolai Berdyaev (Lampert, 1945) and extensively developed by an Italian philosopher Umberto Eco (Eco, 1986) and, most notably, Australian political scientist Hedley Bull, who has given an academically grounded description of a new system of international relations, which he referred to as neo-medievalism (Bull, 1977).

What unites all these great thinkers is a strong belief in the existence of various political, economic, social and cultural tendencies within the modern society which are claimed to be reminiscent of processes historically related to the Middle Ages. That being said, it is important to clarify that it would be rather unwise to seek for direct analogies between these days and the past, as Eco pointed (1986). However, some important similarities might be noticed, on the basis of which it is possible to make a few interesting conclusions.

Firstly, the beginning of the Middle Ages was a period of extreme uncertainty and anxiety. Meanwhile, despite rapid scientific and technological progress, the XXI century has also become a difficult time period, incorporating severe financial crises with global warming, viral pandemics, expansionist wars and Islamist terrorism. According to the World Health Organisation, between 2020 and 2022 there was a rapid surge by approximately 25 percent in the prevalence of anxiety worldwide (World Health Organization, 2022). Besides, a number of people coming from developed countries have parallelly been reported to become more religious (Sahgal & Connaughton, 2021). Needless to say, faith, and more specifically Christianity, was a basis of the mediaeval civilisation in Europe.

Secondly, the era of the Middle Ages is known to have started from the so-called *Völkerwanderung* (Pohl, 2013), when large-scale movements of tribes and peoples were taking place across the globe, particularly from Asia to Europe. Since 2015, the migration figures from various regions of the world, particularly from the Middle East, Ukraine, Russia, and many other countries, have been steadily increasing and there seems to be no sign of a slowdown (Sohst, Tjaden, de Valk, & Melde, 2020).

Thirdly, there is a change of public perception of capitalism with an increasing demand for a more morally driven economy based on some ethical considerations (Lewicki, et al., 2016). For years, the free market was claimed to be a guarantee of individual freedom. The neoliberal philosophy was widely accepted and used by the Western countries as an ideological

response to collectivist Marxism-Leninism (Harvey, 2005). However, in recent years the world has undergone a number of financial crises. In the situation of increasing economic instability, people became more inclined to welcome the welfare state, sometimes also at the expense of their individual freedom for security (Ebbinghaus, Lehner, & Naumann, 2022). Not only does this concern the abstract government, which has been generally becoming more paternalistic over the years, but also the corporations, some of which claim to care for their employees but require firmer loyalty from them in return. This arguably marks a gradual transition from neoliberalism to the so-called neo-feudalism, when an increasing number of people are giving up freedom for protection by either the government, or some alternative forms of authority from various external threats. Arguably, this is a rather negative feature of the XXI century, however, it apparently does exist, indicating the general trend towards the neo-mediaeval era.

Fourthly, and most importantly, the system of international relations, traditionally based on the notion of the so-called Westphalian sovereignty, dating back to the Peace of Westphalia (1648), has also been rapidly transforming since the end of World War II. This process was profoundly described by Hedley Bull in his book “The Anarchical Society” (1977). Among his main points there have been integration of existing nation states into supranational unions at the expense of their own independence, which generally reflects the ongoing process of European integration, as previously discussed, and the rise of multinational corporations and intergovernmental organisations which tend to act beyond the national borders as a “soft power”. Thus, the definition of nation state and its sovereignty would become increasingly blurred, according to Bull (1977). This phenomenon can generally be referred to as the fragmentation of power, since more and more institutions, apart from the central government, can influence many vital political, economic and social decisions. It is worth mentioning that such a system used to be typical for mediaeval Europe, particularly for the Holy Roman Empire (962 – 1806), where an emperor, feudal lords, the Church, corporations and the so-called free cities were competing for the right to govern (Bloch, 1962).

Broadly speaking, neo-medievalism as a concept has many more dimensions. However, for this paper, the latter two present some special interest, since they provide the reader with both economic and geopolitical perspectives on further development of the European Union in the near future. Both trends suggest that the fragmentation of power is already going on many levels.

For example, the corporations command regular workers integrated into their structures on the one hand, and have an impact on consumers’ tastes, opinions and political views on the other hand, which is especially true for large technology conglomerates such as Meta Platforms

and Twitter. Indeed, the censorship or promotion of certain figures through social networks, particularly with the filing of either more pro-left, or pro-right administration, during the election period have already shown themselves as effective ways to influence the election results and further political events (Wallace-Wells, 2023).

Meanwhile, the authorities of most European countries have to comply with the recommendations, regulations, directives and decisions made by the European Commission and the European Central Bank as well as North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and sometimes also the United Nations (UN). Consequently, the network of various governmental institutions is gradually increasing, with both internal and external policies formulated in accordance with the resolutions issued by non-national authorities.

In parallel, the atmosphere of increasing anxiety, brought by various aspects of modern life, including terrorism, pandemics, financial instability, etc., causes individuals to vest more power into the national governments, allowing them to increase the number of policemen and surveillance cameras to combat crime, introduce lockdown measures to protect people from the spread of viruses, conduct strict fiscal policy and regularly intervene into the economic processes to ensure social justice and relative equality. Even though a few of these measures are often viewed as divisive and limiting individual freedom, they seem to be welcome by a large number of citizens (Ebbinghaus, Lehner, & Naumann, 2022).

It is worth mentioning that human history is sometimes argued by prominent philosophers and historians to be circular, coming and returning to the situations, similar to those in the past (Spengler, 1918). Undoubtedly, understanding the key aspects of these situations and detecting the accompanying trends may allow politicians and economists to adopt a more balanced approach to emerging problems and, hence, make more sustainable decisions. This might also hold for European integration policy, the future of which will be profoundly discussed in the next part of the paper.

## **6. The Policy: The Plan For Unification**

As it has been previously discussed, the contemporary forms of European integration are sometimes viewed as oriented on further centralisation of power in Brussels and, for this reason, are causing much debate, leading to the rapid rise of Euroscepticism. However, the dissolution of the EU and return to the nation states seems to be equally unrealistic as well as undesirable. Consequently, there is a need for an alternative approach.

Taking into consideration the existing trend towards the neomedieval era in the field of European geopolitics, it might be sensible to adapt to it and use its positive aspects to give proper responses to some of the relevant challenges. In this respect, the concept of neo-medievalism seems to be particularly interesting.

Provided that the future European Union or even the European Federation was organised as the Holy Roman Empire in the modern context, a high level of decentralisation would be guaranteed to all the regions. In the geographic sense, this could technically be achieved in correspondence with the 1992 plan proposed by Freddy Heineken “The United States of Europe, A Eurotopia?”. According to it, the continent would be divided into seventy-five ethnically and linguistically homogeneous semi-sovereign regions (Heineken, 1992), such as Franconia, Bavaria, Lombardy, Naples, Sicily as well as Limburg and Friesland, etc. On account of the fragmentation of power, each of those “states” would be autonomous and governed through a highly decentralised network of various institutions, with the European Commission being a distant regulator, similarly to the Holy Roman emperor. In this case, most power would be held by the local governments, private businesses and trade unions, which would appeal to the central administration only in case of urgent need. Arguably, this would solve the problem of the loss of sovereignty and ensure more democracy, since people would be able to regain full control of the socio-economic and political situation within their province. The concept of national sovereignty would be gradually replaced by the notion of regional autonomy, ensuring the conservation of local cultures and languages. Besides, various forms of separatism in Spain, Italy and other countries would become irrelevant, since Basque, Catalanian and North Italian regions would be guaranteed to have a satisfactory level of self-governance, equally with those provinces which are now claimed to have more power within the existing national borders.



Figure 2: Picture of Heineken Eurotopia, retrieved from *Regionen Europas*

Having said that, it is highly unlikely that all the European countries would be ready to fully accept the proposed plan immediately. This is exactly what is slowing down European integration in its current form, since there is an obvious disbalance in the public opinion across countries, such as France and Poland, in relation to the EU and its future. However, neo-medievalism provides a solution to this problem too, since being based on the ideas of decentralisation and power fragmentation, it does not require all the member regions to be equally integrated into the future federation. Under this approach, it would be acknowledged that some states would probably need considerably more time and effort to participate actively in the process of federalisation. Thus, some inequality in the level of integration would certainly be allowed, giving additional scope for the geopolitical compromise, which is de-facto impossible today because of some nations being frightened by the idea of the dissolution of their cultural identities in the pan-European universalism. This principle of differentiated integration is often referred to as “Multi-speed Europe” (Stefan, 2021) and could be perfectly fitted into the general framework of the neo-medieval federalisation policy.

Because of the aspects of the plan described above, local populations would be more likely to accept the proposal, since governmental leaders in some countries are often accused of playing the role of the executors of the European Commission’s will on the national level (Meister, 2022). From this undoubtedly Eurosceptic perspective, the sovereign state is no longer a reliable source of people’s power. In this case, decentralisation and redistribution of responsibility would restore the citizens’ feeling of being in charge of their destinies. In the cold light of day, it is comparatively easier to control the political process on the local rather than on the upper levels of the governmental system. This is partially confirmed by the effectiveness of the Swiss model of government, where the so-called cantons, which are small by area semi-sovereign states united into a confederation, enjoy significant autonomy, whilst most relevant decisions are made on referendums and subsequently executed by the local authorities (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

That said, under such conditions, all the current economic and social benefits of the EU-membership would be maintained, whilst the accompanying negative factors would arguably be neutralised. Hence, the European Union would be prevented from dismantlement, as most nations would likely be willing to stay and accept the proposal. Besides, through introduction of some additional mutual institutions such as the European army as well as of the common borders, the unity of the future Federation would be further strengthened despite some inner decentralisation.

To summarise, the doctrine of neo-medievalism would guarantee stable and positive development of European integration, which would be based on mutual agreement between all the participants. Most disadvantages of the current policy concerning its cultural and economic aspects would be effectively solved. Thus, a brighter future for Europe would be ensured and ultimately brought into reality.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has provided an overview of the main challenges, which have been faced by the European Union in recent years and questioned the future direction of European integration. On the one hand, it can be argued that the rise of Euroscepticism, eastern members' undermining of European authorities and lastly, what many view as the start of a domino fall by the first ever member exit by the United Kingdom, point that further integration is unrealistic, with the dismantlement of the EU being the most sensible option. On the other hand, the abandonment of the bloc lacks feasibility. Not only can poor Brexit outcomes be taken as a comparative, but also numerous public figures have manifested the aspiration to promote further European integration. This is also reflected in the political views of the wider population which is increasingly welcoming the welfare state in the light of unprecedented crises like COVID-19 and the urgency to cooperatively confront socio-economic issues, making the case for the EU as a "soft power". Thus, it is obvious that finding a suitable solution is a rather complex issue.

In search for a feasible solution to the concern of integration in the European Union, the authors proposed a model of European Federation which would be based on the tenets of neo-medievalism. Specifically, the allocation of power is focused on sub-national levels while ensuring commitment with the central level, that is, the European Commission, which would act as a distant regulator. On the naked eye, it can be argued that such proposal would seem unfeasible within the context of the EU, after all, it seems counterintuitive for member states, which have exhibited various degrees of discomfort in devolving part of their sovereignty to the Union, to redistribute even higher amounts to regions and local actors. Nevertheless, as exemplified by the Swiss model, considering power would be rechannelled within national authorities, it is plausible that such a model would be accepted, albeit a time lag for its full implementation. Moreover, the decentralisation and distribution of power is likely to result in efficiency gains due to a higher degree of control of power, making the model ever so appealing.



It is worth mentioning that the concept of federalism can be viewed as a pendulum swinging between re-centralization and decentralisation of powers. Even though the tentative solution proposes a form of federation, the strength of a possible new era of European federalism lies in dynamism of such a model, which allows member regions to find the right balance between autonomy and solidarity within the multi-tier governments. This permits to reconfigure a model where the current EU, along with its various benefits, concedes member states to acquire a higher degree of autonomy without such circumstances compromising the continuity of the EU. It is important to realise how in an ever-changing world with increasing challenges, the current direction of EU integration seems to lack realism. Consequently, such a feudal system should be prepared for constant updates to match new needs and obstacles. As expressed by Alber and Valdescalici (2012, p. 364), “the very nature of federalism in its never-ending search for balance” highlights the strength of such a model in fostering the perseverance of the European Union by featuring states' evident need to re-centralize while accommodating decentralisation claims.

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