



The Emergence of a European Empire

An Inquiry into the Changing Political Order of World Society

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Abstract

This study inquires the changing political order of world society focusing on the emergence of a hierarchical discursive configuration at the margins of the European Union. The reflexibilisation of geopolitical as well as constitutional structures after the end of the Cold War triggered a dynamic process of extroversion whereby the EU projects its internal hegemonic formation beyond its organisational boundaries. Within its new periphery, laboratories of experimentation have been created where a wide range of subtle and sophisticated technologies of government are being applied. The European Union is part of a wider process of asymmetric constitutionalisation in the course of which the classical states system is increasingly integrated into or absorbed by an internally fragmented global techno-bureaucratic structure. Domestic political and administrative institutions are progressively transformed into pure organisational forms which can be programmed from a meta-organisational level. In Europe a form of postmodern imperial order is silently emerging without following an elaborated masterplan.

Analysing the emergence of a European empire understood as a dynamic process that unfolds within modern world society calls for the flexible combination of diverse theoretical and methodological tools. An adequate understanding of the changing order of world society, I argue, requires a parallel focus on evolving forms of social organisation, on the development of technology as well as on the transformation of symbolic orders. This study tries to combine a re-constructed concept of empire with elements of modern social systems theory and post-Marxist discourse theory. If one assumes the idea of an increasingly internally differentiated world society forming a polycontextuality of social systems as well as of discursively sedimented political forms, then only a critical or problem-oriented (rather than problem-solving) approach can be useful. My primary concern is, therefore, not to specify the ontological quality of the EU 'polity' but rather to analyse more concretely what consequences these transformative processes have for political practices as well as for the conditions of constituting legitimate political order and authority.



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Bio Eric Heine studied history, political science and French literature at Paris IV-Sorbonne and at the University of Freiburg. He also holds an M.E.S. from Humboldt University and an M.Res in Political and Social Sciences from the European University Institute. Eric attended a special programme for young professionals from Poland, Russia and Germany at the European Academy Berlin and joined the EUI after having worked for the Institute for European Policy (IEP) in Berlin.