

Processes of European (Dis)Integration in Context of New Medievalism

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Abstract

What is the source of the European Union's crisis? Are disintegrating tendencies so serious? How the scope and content of member states' sovereignty has changed within the years of integration process? The paper puts out a thesis that the answer to these questions can be found in the concept of new medievalism. This concept allows us to look at the EU from the perspective of historiosophy and civilization studies as well as globalization processes and qualitative changes in international politics. More broadly, this concept concerns the entire West, regarding social, political and economic changes which affect the position of western civilization in terms of its global domination. The "New Middle Ages" (another name for "new medievalism" in civilization studies) also refers to the European integration theory, providing a fresh look at the European history (this concept strongly refers to history) and interpretation of the presence at once. In the field of European Studies known is model of Europe as neo-medieval Empire, which provides the theoretical apparatus for research on changes of politics and power in Europe. The concept of new medievalism also investigates the risks of disintegration – that's why it helps to understand the possible consequences of EU's breakup. The aim of the paper is to present the interpretations of new medievalism, regarding the causes and possible outcomes of EU's disintegration.

Keywords: European integration, disintegration, new medievalism, the West, civilization, globalization

Introduction. New medievalism, its scope and content

A concept that pays particular attention to the changes in the structure of the world we are used to, and which we often overlook (or do not want to see) is the idea of the New Middle Ages. This approach is setting into the current of postmodernism and broadly understood history of ideas, and can be considered as a certain historiosophical concept and vision of the future not only of Europe and Western civilization, but also of the global scene of international relations. In the context of the European Union there are also comparisons to the Roman Empire, both in terms of the shape of the political organization and the consequences of a possible collapse. Moreover, in the question of the future of Europe, the idea of new medievalism was applied in the creation of a new model of integration (the model of Europe as the neo-medieval empire of Jan Zielonka), and in this case it is not only an approach, but even a paradigm that competes with the prevailing in political science paradigm of the Westphalian nation-state as it defines European integration in an increasingly critical way, evaluating the direction in which it is heading, as well as rejecting the conceptual grid, typical for the Westphalian paradigm. That makes a great importance of new medievalism for the development of European Studies as the academic discipline.

Increasingly, the question of the future of the European Union (since 2004 because of eastern enlargement) has raised in the public debate. Will the idea of European integration survive the current crises? What is the EU phenomenon? Can the idea of the New Middle Ages be applied in European Studies? Can we talk about risk of a disintegration? If so, what phenomena in the social, political, economic or cultural spheres can be the proof for this? In what direction does the Union head, do the traditional social movements or political parties participate in it? What could be the consequences of disintegration of the EU? Is it possible to identify the source of overlapping crises? Finding answers to these questions is the key issue to understanding the changing world of Europe and the world as well as the condition of Western civilization and the shaping of world order. The paper puts out a thesis that the answer to these questions can be found in the concept of new medievalism.

Idea of the "New Middle Ages" as a concept in the field of civilization studies consist of a concept of civilization in the philosophy of history (according to philosophy of Nikolai Berdyaev) (Berdyaev, 2003), a theory of social-economic system

(transformations and current phenomena in the world economy, the transition of power from the nation-state to the supranational and transnational levels, migrations, social inequalities at global scale) so-called "impressions" of the "spirit of our times" and of perspectives on the altitude towards future as well as the past, to precise – European (Western) past. Despite the crucial issue of the Global Era we must remember that this concept considers Europe (and, more specifically, the political and social structure of the European Union) and, more widely, the West at all. Apart from civilization studies, the most influential interpretation of new medievalism comes from the field of international relations. In this area new medievalism concerns the studies of the position and role of non-state actors as well as the scope and content of states' sovereignty. In some aspects, e.g. terrorism, it is close to the issues of security, too. Thanks to this complexity, we can look at the present form of politics and civilization from the theoretical perspective in various aspects. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to present the interpretations of new medievalism, regarding the causes and possible outcomes of EU's disintegration. The chosen research method in the work is the analysis of interpretations of new medievalism in the existing literature.

"New Middle Ages" in civilization studies – the unclear future of the West

The foundation of the idea of the New Middle Ages is its close relationship with historiography and cultural changes. It is part of the philosophy of Nikolai Berdyaev (as it was already mentioned above), a Russian thinker who introduced his ideas after the First World War. The distinctive feature of his approach is a religious and existential approach to historiography and from this perspective a critical evaluation of modernity (Berdyaev, 2003). Berdyaev presented an alternative vision of social development based on the spiritual unity of the West. The classification of Berdyaev's concept as historiography raises some doubts, but it can certainly be regarded as a kind of vision of the future of Western civilization, which the author considered necessary for survival of the mankind.

Berdyaev very negatively assessed capitalism, mass society, the domination of rationalism and materialism. According to him, capitalism has already reached the peak of its development. Moreover, the retreat from religion, distinctive for Western civilization, will be the main cause of its collapse. Berdyaev also has been against the "institutional" products of rationalism: liberal democracy, secularism of the state (in the Westphalian model), separation of the private and public sphere. The negative assessment of rationalism and anthropocentrism has made Berdyaev to announce the "twilight of the Renaissance" and the expectation of the end of capitalism as the end of modern history and at the same time the beginning of the "New Middle Ages" (Berdyaev, 2003). The Russian philosopher the era in the history of humanity divided into sensual and intuitive. This division is the basis of his historiography (Berdyaev, 2003). Berdyaev compared Renaissance to the day (sensual age), and the Middle Ages to the night (intuitive age). This comparison has the most positive character - according to Russian philosopher night allows you to stop and reflect on your life, and also directs the human mind on spiritual matters that obscures the light of the day (Berdyaev, 2003).

"New Middle Ages" and the Global Era – outcomes of neoliberal capitalism

The concept of the New Middle Ages returned to the humanities and social sciences back several dozen years ago and corresponds with numerous interpretations of the post-modern world (Bauman, 1997) (Castells, 2000) (Little Richard, 2006) In addition, comparisons to the Middle Ages have permeated the public debate. In this context, these comparisons relate to changes in international relations and factors determining them and the growth of social inequalities (both on a supranational and regional scale). The current situation is the effect of the neoliberal doctrine in the economy and the technological revolution (Kahneman, 4.04.2015). After the transformations initiated in the second half of the 20th century, relations within the world economy will be crucial for the whole of social and individual life. This means, e.g. very strong tensions between the rich and the poor, between the ideas of elitism and the concepts that emerged from egalitarianism. This can lead to the end of liberal democracy, which is a condition for the efficient functioning of a strong middle class and a belief in the equality of all people.

An important factor is also already mentioned globalization, which in connection with the dominance of neoliberal solutions in the economy emphasizes stronger economic centers. There are disputes in the literature about whether we are dealing with the globalization of trade or its regionalization. The concept of the new medievalism, for which the division of world trade and production is particularly important, also draws attention to such questions. The common denominator for these important issues is the structural crisis of capitalism (especially after the financial breakdown of 2008). Parag Khanna even puts forward the thesis of "postmodern Middle Ages" (Khanna, 2009), pointing to further weakening of the nation-state towards the establishment of (really) global governance and the importance of cities as independent subjects of the global

economy (Khanna, 2009). Also multipolar shape of contemporary the world and the increase in the importance of non-state actors (from large corporations to non-governmental organizations), in international relations indicate similarities to the Middle Ages (Khanna, 2010). The issue that is decisive for the shape of the "postmodern Middle Ages" is, as mentioned, an increase in social inequalities on a global scale, resulting from the strengthening of divisions between the center and the periphery.

New medievalism in international relations theory – a claim for a new picture of politics

Therefore, it's the time to think of international politics indirectly. New medievalism in the field of international relations theory has its source in the premonition about the significance of the transition period after World War II, inter alia in the works by Hedley Bull (Bull, 2002), created on the assumption that the second part of the 20th century could be similar to the times of the Middle Ages in political aspects – mainly in the supposed "End of Westphalia" in terms of falling domination of the nation-state as a category of actors on the global stage (Matthews, 1997, p. 65). In addition, it is certainly worthwhile to mention that Arnold Wolfers, writing in the 1960s about the condition of international relations as an academic discipline, saw a trend that, in his opinion, was a sign of the blurring of borders between the external and the internal. According to Wolfers, the reason for this tendency were the conditions which changed the world after World War II, and in which we can find the elements of internationalist ideologies and homogeneous nation-state, the transnational co-operation and selfish nationalism, and the wars, difficult to classify as external or internal (Wolfers, 1962, p. 242). This trend Wolfers called "new medievalism", although it is Hedley Bull, who is considered to be the creator of this concept, known as *the system of overlapping authority and multiple loyalty* (Bull, 2002, p. 245).

"Westphalia" in this context is seen as a metaphor for the origin of the European system of states in the Early Modern Period and as a symbol of political order based on the nation-state as the main and only subject of international politics. The "New Middle Ages" instead is a metaphor for the future of international system and its evolution in terms of its organization, governance, and its subjects in a way that can make the system similar to the medieval one (Kobrin, 1998, pp. 365-366). Actually, it concerns the role of non-state actors, so the multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations, megacities and global cities (some of them even make a claim for independence), informal groups and networks (like terrorists), subregional communities on a path towards autonomy or independence (like Catalonia or Scotland) and forms of regional, international or supranational cooperation or integration like the European Union. In addition, it is connected to interplay between the public authority and private sphere which denies the "traditional" boundary between the public and the private. In this last context, new medievalism is an approach to understand the transitions and changes on a global scale, regarding power shifts, expected decline of the US and crisis of neoliberal capitalism. The condition of economy is close to social issues – in this aspect there appears a notion of "neofeudalism" which refers to informal side of social life. This side develops strongly because of governance and security deficit alongside with growing economic inequalities (Williams, 2008, p. 11). From the other side, the power shifts (both formal and informal) as well as expected decline of the superpower of the US are creating the vision of multipolar and more diverse world.

Concept of Europe as neo-medieval Empire in European integration theory. A claim for a new paradigm of integration

Also, more precisely, the concept of new medievalism regards new, expected after the eastern enlargement, shape of European integration – the neo-medieval paradigm, created by Jan Zielonka. Furthermore, it concerns the position and influence of Europe in expected multipolar world after the decline of the US superpower. In the analysis of European crises (financial, economic, social, migration and democracy) it reflects European reality between the daydream and the nightmare. In this case, empire as the form of authority and power – in the contrast to the nation-state – is not designed to be homogeneous. Moreover, the main issue is the distinction between the nation-state and empire (neo-medieval empire, not Westphalian like the United Kingdom in 19th century) in terms of administrative organization, economic governance, structure of borders, means of law enforcement, factors which create the common polity and features which are distinctive for a demos, and model of connections and relationships (*de facto* and *de iure*) between subjects which create the nation-state and the empire. The empire in this case is an alternative option to the state and indicate that we would be able to establish political organization which would not be a kind of state.

New medievalism in the field of European studies, just like in the international relations theory, is connected to works by Hedley Bull (Bull, 2002), mainly with expected "End of Westphalia" in terms of fading the nation-state away as a sort of actors on the global stage (Matthews, 1997, p. 65). What is important, in the field of European integration theory,

suggestions for changing the model of European integration began to appear before the outbreak of the economic crisis, and even before the Lisbon Treaty had been accepted. It was the perspective of Eastern enlargement that raised doubts about the proper shape of integration and even its future. Then the economic crisis and, particularly, the financial crisis of the Eurozone drew attention to the shortcomings of the European economic project. A few years later, war on Ukraine raised doubts about the EU enlargement policy, as well as the effectiveness of its diplomatic abilities as a whole. At present, the challenge for integration is the refugee and migration crisis, which concerns the loyalty and solidarity of member states. An issue important to integration process is also the war on terrorism with the Islamic State whose actions threaten the internal security of the Union.

This is the empirical as well as the mindset background of the model of Europe as the neo-medieval empire, created by Jan Zielonka, which was based on the assumption that EU *finalité politique* would resemble the neo-medieval empire rather than the Westphalian nation-state. The crucial circumstances for this concept were the eastern enlargement of the EU and the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty (Zielonka, 2007). In the field of European Studies, the job for the neo-medieval paradigm of integration is to replace the conceptual apparatus and worldview of the Westphalian nation-state for the case of EU political system. According to the model of Europe as empire, the Union cannot be seen as the “superstate”, because it is too diverse and too large (Zielonka, 2007, pp. 10-11). The diversity in this case affects not only culture, but also social or economic systems, political traditions, technological development or political regimes. In this context, the main problem of thinking on the future of the EU is the involuntarily reference to the notions and phrases applied for the nation-state in Westphalian model. In the labyrinth of historical analogies one has to point out that the model neo-medieval empire is an abstract concept, referring only a little to the organization of political units in the Middle Ages. The contemporary model of the nation-state (Westphalian or, rather, neo-Westphalian), which Zielonka opposes the construction of empire, is also the ideal type and is referring to the form of political organization that started to emerge in the Early Modern Period.

The starting point for seeking the analogy between contemporary Europe and the medieval empire is the shape of the EU borders after the 2004 enlargement and the prospect of further territorial development (Zielonka, 2007, p. 4). The shape of borders is the crucial factor here, as it reflects the way in which power is enforced – the borders of the Westphalian states are tight and precise, both on maps and on the ground, and the territorial scope of the Westphalian states overlaps with the boundaries of a particular legal, administrative and economic order. On the other hand, in medieval empire, the borders are semi-open, fuzzy and permeable, and the territorial scope of the formal authority does not overlap with legal or economic jurisdiction. Today we can see certain derogations from the rule of homogenous boundaries – for example the agreements on local border traffic that let the residents of external border districts enter the EU without a visa – this solution was applied, e.g. for border traffic between Poland and Russia and between Poland and Ukraine. Also it should be noted that the territorial scope of the Union does not overlap with its functional dimension – the single market also includes members of the European Economic Area which are not in the EU. A similar situation concerns the Schengen system.

The next issue, related to the structure of borders, is the political system. Of course, it is a democratic regime, but the organization of authority and power in a neo-medieval way changes the way democracy works, compared to the model we get used to live in inside the nation-states. First and foremost, the structure of authority is different – while in the Westphalian model we are dealing with hierarchical and closed governance, in the neo-medieval empire power will be dispersed and disjoint, creating multi-layered structures with a variable number of “rungs” and with varying territorial and functional range, that shapes them into a form of “concentric circles” (Zielonka, 2007, pp. 153-159). It should be noted that such a “cascade” layout of governance is relevant to the problems of the Community with regard to the difficulties in defining leadership and political loyalties. The question of identity is also a meaningful factor of relations between citizens and the authority in the empire – European identification is weak and fades away in the multiplicity of identities and loyalties that cross each other in the strongly differentiated society of the whole empire.

New medievalism and the anxiety of disintegration. The risk of no action and no mindset change

Apart from all the mentioned topics “new medievalism” deals with the issue of disintegration in Europe as well as the other parts of the world. In European Studies it especially concerns the risk of disintegration of the EU, supporting the search for new modes of integration (Zielonka, 2014). In this aspect it is close to new medievalism in international relations theory, as it was mentioned previously. For the research agenda in social sciences it is especially important because among the scholarship there is a call for disintegration theory (Vollard, 25th-27th September 2008) – we have to face the risk of disintegration of the EU despite there is no full and established theory of disintegration. In the contrary, we have many approaches to integration, both explanatory and normative. This call is strongly connected with similar problem of

international relations fieldwork where there is no full and systematic approach of the international politics in the global and multipolar world, which would consider also the changes of the scope and content of the sovereignty. It is especially necessary because of Brexit and its possible outcomes. Certainly, as in the case of integration, we can talk about disintegration as the process, and even the processes, taking into account the overlapping phenomena, events and processes in different areas at different times. Regarding the specific vision of the world and man in it, the New Middle Ages is also a meta-narration – both for the case of the person within the society and political affairs at the global level – which can change the way we got used to think about the politics.

Conclusions. Wide range of interpretations and narrow scope of clarifications in face of insecure future

It is difficult to predict what Nikolai Berdyaev – as well as Hedley Bull – would say, observing civilization changes at the beginning of 21st century, including postmodernism, technological revolution, the Internet or the crisis of capitalism. Apart from the individual assessments of the present “organization of the world” in social and economic terms or the condition of Western civilization, concepts and views that create the idea of the New Middle Ages (or representing a similar viewpoint) allow you to look at the changes from different perspectives. They also help to realize the processes in which the man at the turn of the 20th and 21st century participates. This also applies to the causes of current events and the possible way of their development. At this point, questions about the future (what will happen next - what will the world look like?) meet the concerns about the past (why it happens? When did it start?), which also forces us to reflect on the present. The idea of the New Middle Ages as an approach within the theory of civilization (primarily in the philosophical and cultural dimension) in combination with the concept of the socio-economic system (on a global scale) and transformation of social relations and threats. This why it enables a holistic view of how the modern world functions, both at the level of global processes and in the case of an individual, due to the importance of change and their direct impact on human life and functioning in the 21st century. The concept of the New Middle Ages combines different perspectives that complement each other.

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