

Europe as empire: the nature of the enlarged European Union. By Jan Zielonka. Oxford:

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This is a stimulating and original contribution to the debate about what the European Union (EU) is for, how it should be organized, and what its future should be. Zielonka's starting point is the fact that the ending of the Cold War, by allowing the 'old' EU to incorporate first a group of neutral states and then several ex-members of the Warsaw Pact (including ex-components of the Soviet Union), changed the nature of the Union, and the course of its development, much more profoundly than most of us have realized.

To be sure, as he notes, the EU has itself transformed the countries of Central and Eastern Europe too—acting as an 'empire' in one sense by coercing its neighbours into adopting economic, legal and political patterns in its own image—but he argues that the bigger effect of this enlargement has been to transform the way in which the EU must be conceived. Coming into existence after 1945 as a reaction against Europe's sovereign nation-states as these had emerged from the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the institutions of 'Europe' were themselves seen as requiring some 'Westphalian' characteristics: they were given powers over agriculture and trade, some welfare functions, and even some authority over policing, foreign policy and defence, in the name of a concept which persisted right up to the debacle of the EU's 'Constitution' in 2005.

Today, Zielonka argues, we should realize the manifest shortcomings of this approach—particularly in the light of the enlarged EU's extraordinary diversity, which he copiously and convincingly documents—and adopt a radically different analogy. The 'Empire' which he commends as a relevant model for comprehending and for developing the EU is none other than the Holy Roman Empire of the Middle Ages. The author is at pains to stress that the European system of the present and the future should be seen as 'neo-medieval' rather than medieval *tout court*; but he maintains that such a system of 'overlapping authorities, divided sovereignty, diversified institutional arrangements, and multiple identities' (p. 15) characterizes today's EU, and tomorrow's, more aptly than any form of 'neo-Westphalian' ideal-type.

This proposed reconceptualization of the balance between 'Brussels' and other levels of authority needs a good deal of detailed working out, both in theory and in practice, but Zielonka has very clearly laid down the lines of a fundamental argument. Again (as he freely recognizes), historians will certainly dispute parts of his interpretation of medieval Europe, not least his contention (p. 149) that this period was much freer of serious warfare than Europe after 1648. Indeed, the whole project of invoking the Middle Ages to interpret the present day is open to the charge of selectivity and oversimplification (one of the authorities quoted by Zielonka, on p. 266, seems not to be clear whether she is writing about the Holy Roman Empire or the Roman Empire of antiquity). However, his systematic

exploration of how well his 'neo-medieval' concept fits the EU's present-day realities, in such highly specific areas as economic governance, political processes and external relations, deserves very serious consideration.

Zielonka's arguments are backed up by massive evidence (his 90 closely printed pages of notes and bibliography would furnish reading-matter for several degree courses, and a number of doctoral theses as well), and should be read by all concerned with the current debate about the EU's identity.

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