

EUROPE AS EMPIRE: THE NATURE OF THE ENLARGED EUROPEAN UNION

Jan Zielonka

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Would you prefer to live in a neo-medieval Empire or Belgium? In the opinion of Jan Zielonka and Paul Belien you probably already live in one of them.

If you would most likely choose Belgium, you can read *A Throne in Brussels* to learn every disadvantage of it according to Paul Belien. However, if you are afraid of living in a neo-medieval Empire you should definitely read *Europe as Empire* to see the many similarities between a neo-medieval Empire and the EU, as well as learn of some of the possible solutions, according to Jan Zielonka.

Both authors attempt to set out the historic identity of the 'unidentified political project' which is the European Union in the opinion of its leading politician Jacques Delors. Zielonka claims the EU is in fact more similar to a medieval Empire than a contemporary state. Belien argues Belgium has been the prototype of the EU.

Examining the nature of the enlarged EU, Zielonka finds similarities with a neo-medieval empire with a polycentric system of multilevel governance, different types of political units operating in a system without a clear power centre and hierarchical, several and overlapping jurisdictions, as well as separated sovereignty.

Zielonka rejects the dominant paradigm that sees the EU as dominated by a monolithic central state. In his opinion the EU is now dominated by institutional engineering by social democrats and Christian democrats; it represents the victory of the communitarian model over the liberal approach that supports diversity.

Zielonka argues the EU, like all empires, is more preoccupied with maintaining its internal cohesion than in solving external problems. But it exports European forms of economic governance to its neighbours. In his opinion, the distinction between members and non-members of the EU is being replaced by a typical neo-medieval cleavage between Europe's centre(s) and periphery.

Particularly interesting is Zielonka's claim that a genuine neo-medieval empire

would be more flexible in economic policy than the present EU. The answer of the contemporary state to the challenges of cohesion within an enlarged EU is regulation. The neo-medieval proposal would be innovation, investments, entrepreneurship, flexibility and decentralisation – the spirit of the Lisbon Agenda.

Although new member states may naturally prefer the first solution, the second one should be better for them and more acceptable to old members. Transfers of payments are not necessarily good for new members; they need more innovation, competition, deregulation, as well as entrepreneurship education, ethics and culture. High social and environmental standards, limits to tax competition and convergence criteria are not helpful for new countries.

Belien's long, pessimistic history of Belgium and the private life of its kings concludes with the interesting hypothesis that the EU shares the main problems of the country where its headquarters are located. There are clear similarities, such as constructivism, economic socialism and corporatism. He claims that the EU as well as Belgium are artificial systems of financial redistribution without common identities.

However, long parts of Belien's book about the dubious private life of the Belgian kings or the country's shocking policy towards Flanders, the Congo and the German occupation may be interesting but are difficult to link to the current process of European integration.

In conclusion, Zielonka's *Europe as Empire* is an interesting and important work for understanding the construction of the European Union. Similarly, *A Throne in Brussels* includes some interesting ideas on the similarities between Belgium and the EU, but its arguments appear to contain many simplifications and controversial assertions.

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FAMILY POLICY, FAMILY CHANGES: SWEDEN, ITALY AND BRITAIN COMPARED

Patricia Morgan

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Family-friendly policies are high on the agenda of both major political parties in Britain. Yet, are government policies effective in supporting families and do gender-equality policies help reduce the pay gap and lower the glass ceiling?

In *Family Policy, Family Changes*, Patricia Morgan has studied the policies of three countries – Sweden, Italy and Britain. All are members of the EU and economically comparable but their policies and cultural traditions differ. There are some similarities in outcomes. All have a declining birthrate. Italy, a Catholic country that does not endorse contraception, has the lowest birthrate at 1.2 children per woman. Sweden, whose policies are designed to encourage procreation, has the highest proportion of births outside marriage. Britain has the highest rate of teenage pregnancies in Western Europe, a decline in marriage, rising cohabitation, a growth in lone motherhood and a rise in stepfamilies. It also has the highest divorce rate in the EU.

On gender equality, Sweden and Italy appear to be at opposite extremes, with Britain in the middle. Seventy-two per cent of women in Sweden are actively employed compared to 39% in Italy. Britain is close to the EU average at 56%. These statistics, however, mask what is really happening. In Sweden, tax and social policies have 'made just about the most concerted attempt in history to engineer the freedom of women from child-rearing responsibilities and the demise of the traditional family through economic manipulation, social pressures and massive public re-education'. This includes changing the role of men as well as women and shifting from men as breadwinners and women as homemakers to a society in which all tasks are shared. Parenthood is separated from marriage and subsidised child day-care is universal. The tax system treats married and unmarried couples alike but high progressive taxation means that it is mostly impossible to live on only one wage, forcing women out to work.

Yet despite these measures, as well as rigorous equal pay legislation, Sweden has a more gender-segregated workforce than almost all other countries, except those of the Islamic Middle East and Africa. The expansion of welfare occupations has resulted in women being increasingly concentrated in clerical and welfare work, which is often low paid. Many women are employed in looking after other people's children and Morgan questions the economic benefit of this. Men still occupy the larger share of professional and