



The Regional Cooperation Project of the Arab Maghreb Union in the light of the theories explaining the European Integration Project: A Theoretical Approach

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A Theoretical Approach

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تاريخ ارسال المقال: 2022/11/28. تاريخ قبول المقال: 2023/02/17. تاريخ النشر: 2023/03/25

Abstract:

This article deals with the regional cooperation project of the Arab Maghreb Union in light of the theories that explain the European Union, considering the latter is a successful model for regional cooperation based on integration. The experience of European integration constitutes a solid foundation for theoretical application and a template for drawing lessons in order to simulate it for the Arab Maghreb Union. The integration experience in the Arab Maghreb region has proven difficult due to the political, economic, and social obstacles it faces.

Keywords: Arab Maghreb Union, European Union, Integration.

الملخص:

يتناول هذا المقال مشروع التعاون الإقليمي لاتحاد المغرب العربي في ضوء النظريات المفسرة للاتحاد الأوروبي على اعتبار أن الأخير نموذج ناجح للتعاون الإقليمي يقوم على التكامل. وتشكل تجربة التكامل الأوروبي أساساً متيناً للتطبيق النظري ونموذجاً لاستخلاص الدروس بالنسبة لاتحاد المغرب العربي بغرض محاكاته، وأثبتت تجربة الاندماج في منطقة المغرب العربي أنها تجربة صعبة بسبب العقبات السياسية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية التي تعترضها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اتحاد المغرب العربي، الاتحاد الأوروبي، التكامل.



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Introduction

At the end of World War II, the trend of international cooperation emerged in the international relations arena to renounce war and achieve peace. The model of regional cooperation of the European Union emerged in this context, emphasizing a number of various economic and political advantages that can be achieved through integration. And in light of the success of the European Union regional cooperation model, the Maghreb countries launched the regional cooperation project of the Arab Maghreb Union as an attempt to emulate the European Union project and achieve similar economic and political gains.

Despite the one history and cultural homogeneity among the peoples of the Arab Maghreb countries, the Arab Maghreb Union remained suppressed and never rose to the level of the European Union. This failure to activate the project of regional cooperation of the Arab Maghreb Union prompts us to delve into the debates and theories explaining the progress of the European Union to uncover the defects that impede the Arab Maghreb Union.

Therefore, the question to ask is: What are the obstacles in front of activating the Arab Maghreb Union in the light of the theories that explain the European Union? This question would be examined through screening two topics: (1) the European Union as a model for regional cooperation, in which the essay presents the EU as a successful model of regional integration in terms of incorporation, structure and ability to respond to crises over the integration path, and (2) problems of the Arab Maghreb integration project, as the EU theories reveal.

The research methodology used to examine these topics is the historical, comparative, and descriptive-analytical approaches. Basically, to go through the history of the European Union including its theoretical interpretation to analyze its development process; and compare it with the Arab Maghreb Union.

THE FIRST TOPIC: THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A MODEL FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION

The beginning of the emergence of the European integration project dates back to the end of the Second World War, when, due to the huge human and material losses, the need to shift from a violent interrelation pattern to a constructive interrelation pattern based on cooperation rather than conflict was emerged in order to avoid a new war and achieve development,. Alexis Heraclides sums up: "The nationalist principle, according to which all states should correspond to a



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nation and all nations should become states, fell into disrepute in the aftermath of the Second World War. It was vehemently denounced as passé and harmful to the new world society recovering from the war. It was invariably regarded as a manifestation of man's darker side, as the hallmark of prejudice and ethnocentrism that breeds intolerance and aggression. The new panacea pervading the literature of the 1950s and 1960s was none other than integration – integration within and between states –¹.

This new interrelation pattern is quite understood within the framework of functional and intergovernmental theories that are considered as the cornerstone of the integration thought. The most prominent scholars of which, are David Mitrany with classical functionalism, Ernst Haas, Philippe Schmitter, and Karl Deutsch with neo-functionalism, Stanley Hoffmann with classical intergovernmentalism, and Andrew Moravcsik with liberal intergovernmentalism.

Mitrany's classical functionalism assumes that "socio-economic imbalances constitute causes of war, while economic and social recovery constitutes the initial condition for peace. It stresses economic factors and sees that the ultimate outcome of the integration process is the formation of a network of supranational functional organizations and the reconfiguration of the international community on a functional basis rather than on geographical regional basis"². But the model of the European Union's regional cooperation can be explained and understood from neo-functionalism that is concerned with regional integration, not international integration such as the classical functionalism. Haas defines integration in a political sense as: "Political integration is the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities to a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over pre-existing national states"³.

1 Alexis Heraclides, *The Self-determination of Minorities in International Politics*, Routledge, London and New York, 1991, p. 3.

2 أنور محمد فرج، *نظرية الواقعية في العلاقات الدولية: دراسة نقدية مقارنة في ضوء النظريات المعاصرة*، مركز كردستان للدراسات الاستراتيجية، السليمانية، 2017، ص 302-303.

3 See Soren Dosenrode, "Federalism Theory and The New-Functionalism: Elements for an analytical framework", Vol. 2, issue 3, *Centro Studi Sul Federalismo*, 2010, p. 22.



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The new functionalism focused, in addition to the functional aspects, on the role of political actors in the transition from functional integration to political integration¹. It is based on the concept of "spillover", which Philippe Schmitter explains: "spillover refers to the process whereby members of an integration scheme – agreed on some collective goals for a variety of motives but unequally satisfied with their attainment of these goals – attempt to resolve their dissatisfaction by resorting to collaboration in another related sector (expanding the scope of mutual commitment) or by intensifying their commitment to the original sector (increasing the level of mutual commitment), or both"². The main objective of the integration process is to crystallize the concept of the "political community", which Haas considered the final result: "the result is a new political community superimposed over the pre-existing ones"³. The concept of political community means a unified legal framework; joint institutions; the effectiveness of the decision-making center; an identity belonging to the integrated community replaces the identities of the existing national states⁴.

"Karl Deutsch has provided the best-known paradigm of national integration in political science, with his two master concepts: mobilization and assimilation. The basic thrust of his argument is that modernization within states leads to the mobilization of large segments of the rural population. Urbanization and greater communication in turn give rise to assimilation in a far shorter term span than had previously been regarded as possible. The outcome is 'complementarity of social communication', the very stuff of nationhood"⁵.

In 1951, six countries; Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands; decided to establish the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which is regarded as the first step in the European integration project, and in light of the ECSC's success, in 1957, the six ECSC countries signed two new treaties in Rome: the European Economic Community

1 *ibid.*, p. 23.

2 See Michelle Cini and Nieves Perez-Solorzano Borraran, *European Union Politics*, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, fourth edition, 2013, p. 63.

3 See Soren Dosenrode, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

4 Nicola Lj. Iliovski, "The Concept of Political Integration: The Perspectives of New Functionalist Theory", *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Institution for Research and European Studies, 2015, p. 2.

5 Alexis Heraclides, *op. cit.*, p. 3.



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(EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM)¹. In 1992, the Treaty on the European Union; Maastricht Treaty² was signed and entered into force on November 1, 1993, creating the Eurozone; a common currency, a common central bank and a common monetary policy, as well as a common foreign and security policy³. The success of the EU project includes a political will; a Franco-German command; a collective approach based on solidarity; and support from the United States of America in the early years⁴. The European Union has evolved since its founding; today, it has 27 member states⁵, created the concept of "European citizenship"⁶ and achieved great economic growth that made it a global economic pole⁷.

1 Kristin Archick, "The European Union: Current Challenges and Future Prospects", Congressional Research Service, 2017, p. 2.

2 Official website of the EU, "History of the European Union - 1992," available on: https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1990-99_en [accessed on 18/11/2022]

3 Kristin Archick, op. cit., p. 3.

4 Fraser Cameron, "The European Union as a Model for Regional Integration", Council on Foreign Relations, September 2010, p.1.

5 Member States: Spain, Estonia, Portugal, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Hungary, Austria, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Belgium, Bulgaria, Poland, Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, France, Finland, Cyprus, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands. (Britain officially withdrew on 01/31/2020). For more details see:

- Official website of the EU, "Country profiles", available on: https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/country-profiles_en [accessed on 18/11/2022]

6 Citizenship of the Union was established by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 (Article 8, EC Treaty). Since its ratification in November 1993, citizens of the EU have enjoyed a number of rights that are directly conveyed by and enforceable through the Union. They include the right of residence and the right to free movement; the right to vote and stand as a candidate at municipal elections in the member state of residence; the right to vote and stand as a candidate in elections to the European Parliament (EP) in the member state of residence; diplomatic protection while in third countries; and the right to petition the European Parliament. The content of Citizenship article was revised after Treaty revisions in the 1997 Maastricht Treaty. More importantly, a clarification between national and Union citizenship was added at Amsterdam; 'Citizenship of the Union shall complement and not replace national citizenship' (Article 17 EC Treaty). For more details see:

- Michelle Cini, European Union Politics, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, 2003, pp. 397-414.

7 The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in European Union expanded 2.40% in the third quarter of 2022 over the same quarter of the previous year. Among EU Member States, the biggest economies are Germany, France, Italy and Spain. On the expenditure side, household consumption is the main component of GDP and accounts for 56% of its total use, =



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The recent crises of the European Union pose a challenge to the European integration model, the most recent of which was UK's decision to leave the EU – "Brexit" – after a popular referendum in which 51.9% voted to exit¹. The British withdrawal from the European Union comes as a result of the accumulated crises on its legislative body represented in bicameral system (the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union) and its failure to formulate an effective response due to its heterogeneity and the adherence of member states to the accounts of national sovereignty². The Greek crisis produced a high degree of severity and raised serious questions about the principle of solidarity³. "The refugee crisis has undoubtedly demonstrated the full breadth and depth of the crisis in the functioning of the EU and the democratic process of political decision-making. With it, opened is the process of re-examining the existing institutional structures and of redefining the modality of cooperation, especially the relations between EU central authorities and national countries, as well as the mutual relations among member states, especially the largest and the smallest, those that are highly developed and those that are less developed"⁴.

The EU crises reveal a flaw in the neo-functionalism's theoretical construction. Despite activating functional integration by achieving levels of "economic integration"⁵, the political elites of the EU member states did not push for the dismantling of national sovereignty in favor of a

=followed by gross fixed capital formation (20%) and government expenditure (20%). Exports of goods and services account for 46% of GDP while imports account for 42%, adding 4% of total GDP. For more details:

- Trading Economics, "EU GDP Annual Growth Rate", available on: <https://tradingeconomics.com/european-union/gdp-annual-growth-rate> [accessed on 18/11/2022]

1 See Kristin Archick, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

2 See Thomas Piketty, Jeremy Adelman and Anne-Laure Delatte, "How To Save Europe From Its Self", *Foreign Policy*, April 4, 2016, 8:36 am, available on: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/04/how-to-save-europe-from-itself-european-union/> [accessed on 20/11/2022]

3 Kristin Archick, op. cit., p. 9.

4 Pero Maldini and Marta Takahashi, "Refugee Crisis and the European Union: Do the Failed Migration and Asylum Policies Indicate a Political and Structural Crisis of European Integration?", *Communication Management Review*, 2017, pp. 69-70.

5 According to Tinbergen, economic integration is the construction of the most solid economic form, so that all artificial obstacles and restrictions are removed during the implementation process, and so that private institutions can be obtained in coordination and unification. Its levels are: free trade area, customs union, common market, economic union, and economic integration. For more details see:

- محمد فرج، المرجع السابق، ص ص 305-308.



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higher supranational center (political integration). It also highlights the failure of member states' governments in promoting social integration and solidifying the concept of European citizenship. A survey for Pew Research Center showed that in nine EU countries (Spain, Sweden, Germany, Hungary, Greece, Italy, Poland, France, the Netherlands) a median of 53% of citizens want a national referendum on continuing in the EU, and that big majority want their national governments, not Brussels, to handle the future of immigration from outside the EU (median 74%) and within the EU (median 66%), and the future of trade agreements with countries around the world (median 51%)¹. These statistics touch Deutsch's explanation about the disruption of integration process when the mobilization component of the rural communities in the integrated countries, within the context of modernization, outpaces their assimilation of integration².

The inability to meet the conditions of regional integration makes the European integration path continuous and has not reached the status of European federalism (the political community). This is based on A.J.R. Groom and Heraclides, who see that integration as a state occurs when its conditions are met, and as a process when it oscillates between political units ready for integration and others that reject it³. The fluctuation of European integration poses a spillover crisis that the classical and liberal intergovernmentalism approach touched upon.

"Hoffmann's classical intergovernmentalism rejected neo-functionalism claims that European integration was driven by a sort of snowball effect known as 'spillover', arguing that this was more an act of faith than a proven fact, O'Neill states that there was nothing inevitable about the path of the European integration from this perspective and neither was there evidence of any political will to create a federal state in Europe"⁴.

1 Bruce Stokes, Richard Wike and Dorothy Manevich, "Post-Brexit, Europeans More Favorable Toward EU But many back empowering national governments on migration and trade, and they want their own vote on EU membership", *Pew Research Center*, June 2017, available on: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2017/06/15/post-brexit-europeans-more-favorable-toward-eu/> [accessed on 20/11/2022]

2 See Alexis Heraclides, op. cit., pp. 3-6.

3 أنظر جندلي عبد الناصر، *التنظير في العلاقات الدولية بين الاتجاهات التفسيرية والنظريات التكوينية*. دار الخلدونية، الجزائر، الطبعة الأولى، 2007، ص 240.

4 Michelle Cini and Nieves Perez-Solorzano Borrigan, op. cit., p. 75.



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"Liberal intergovernmentalism views the European Union as successful intergovernmental regime designed to manage economic interdependence through negotiated policy coordination and emphasizes the importance of both the preferences and power of states, while national politicians advance state interests that reflect domestic policy preferences, decisions made by the EU are ultimately the result of bargaining among states, agreements are usually reached on a 'lowest common denominator' basis, with clear limits placed on the transfer of sovereignty to supranational agents, thus, Moravcsik clarifies: the broad lines of the European integration since 1955 reflected three factors: patterns of commercial advantage, the relative bargaining power of important governments, and the incentives to enhance the credibility of inter-state commitment"¹.

Thomas Piketty, Jeremy Adelman, and Anne-Laure Delatte, assert that any resolution to Europe's various crises has to resolve the dilemma of the conflict between national sovereignty and European integration; democratization of decision-making; and embodying a strong sense of European citizenship². According to Denise Dunne, "the EU has proven adept to crisis management, which accounts for its survival. On balance, to date the achievements outweigh the deficits"³. By analogy with indicators of crisis management, ability to survive, and maximal gains, the European Union remains a distinguished model of regional cooperation that other regional blocs seek to emulate. The crises that the European integration model witness from time to time does not depart from the framework of the integration path that is subject to shocks due to the complexity of the task of achieving political unification.

THE SECOND TOPIC: PROBLEMS OF THE ARAB MAGHREB INTEGRATION PROJECT

In view of the intellectual discussions and theoretical attempts accompanying the emergence and development of the European Union, a number of theoretical problems arise regarding the Arab Maghreb integration project, as it mainly aims to emulate the European Union's regional cooperation model. The idea of establishing the Arab Maghreb Union comes in isolation from any exceptional historical event such as war, which was the main engine for the emergence of the

1 *ibid.*, p. 79.

2 See Thomas Piketty, Jeremy Adelman and Anne-Laure Delatte, *op. cit.*

3 Denise Dunne, "The big question: has the European Union been a success?", *HistoryExtra*, January 31, 2020 at 9:16 am, available on: <https://www.historyextra.com/period/20th-century/big-question-has-european-union-eu-been-success-brexite/> [accessed on 18/11/2022]



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integration thought in Europe. The Arab Maghreb countries did not fight each other and did not witness the scourge of enemy brothers' war. The colonial era was the link that brought together peoples of the Arab Maghreb region and founded certain different forms of cooperation aimed at ending occupation. This historical context has prevented serious efforts to push for the establishment of a true Arab Maghreb Union.

The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) was founded on February 17, 1989, when the Constitutive Treaty of the Arab Maghreb Union was signed by the Five Heads of State in Marrakech; Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania¹. The Arab Maghreb Union has put forward solid integration objectives but has been inactive for many years².

The issue of dismantling the concept of national sovereignty and transferring national loyalties to a supranational level stands as the biggest dilemma of the Arab Maghreb Union project. Integration in the Maghreb region remains confined to the logic of the state, which is known to be based on fixed models of legitimacy, the thing that collides with the correct path of the integration process³. This path cannot be accommodated by the Arab Maghreb countries, given that they have the same logic, which is to maintain the continuity of regimes, and so regimes with firm legitimacy cannot engage in a course of social change meant to build new loyalties and new forms of power⁴.

The concept of national sovereignty in the Arab Maghreb countries is intrinsically linked to the traditional perception of power and security threat, which hinders any attempt to dismantle national sovereignty, especially in light of intra-regional dissensions and border tensions between some Arab Maghreb countries. Consequently, the course of integration with its political connotations, as defined by Hass, is problematic for the decision-maker in the Arab Maghreb countries and threatens the entity of the state. In other words, the final result that integration aims to achieve, which is to establish a political group, contradicts the nature of the state in the Arab Maghreb region and the set of values that it adopts.

1 Official website of the Arab Maghreb Union, available on <https://maghrebarabe.org/fr/union-du-maghreb-arabe/> [accessed on 18/11/2022]

2 Alexei Kireyev and others, "Economic integration in the Maghreb: an untapped source of growth", *International Monetary Fund*, No. 19/01, 2018, p. 5.

3 أنظر ملاح سعيد، "التكامل الإقليمي كآلية لتفكيك بنية النزاعات الدولية"، *السياسة العالمية*، العدد الأول، جانفي 2017، ص 24.

4 أنظر المرجع نفسه، ص 24.



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In the meantime the European Union project received external support from the United States of America during the early years; the Arab Maghreb Union project did not receive such support. On other hand, the external powers represented in the European Union and the United States of America in particular, perform a big role in continuation of intra-Maghreb dissension through a set of solo projects and initiatives with the Arab Maghreb countries, which negatively affected the Arab Maghreb consensus and imposed obligations contrasted with the goals and ambitions of the Arab Maghreb Union¹.

Whereas the EU enjoys a bilateral Franco-German leadership that has accelerated the success of the European integration project, the intra-Maghreb dissension and political tension between Algeria and Morocco, given their great position in the region, still dominate the Arab Maghreb integration project. The Arab Maghreb countries, as mentioned earlier, are still based on traditional perceptions of power, and thus the state's logic remains in the face of the interior for it works to pass value projects in which it retains the role of the highest value source within the framework of what can be conceptualized stateization of societies².

By moving to the purely economic field that the new functionalism assumes to be the focal point through which the integration project spreads to the upper politics issues and thus achieve political unification, the Arab Maghreb Union, since it was established until now, has not achieved the first level of economic integration, which is the establishment of a free trade zone. In this context, member countries negotiated the establishment of a Maghreb Free Trade Area for integration in all areas of economic activity; an agreement was initialled by trade ministers in 2010, but was never ratified³.

Despite existing institutional arrangements, intra-Maghreb trade remains thin, Maghreb trades far less within itself than with the rest of the world, intra-Maghreb trade is less than 5% of its total trade, compared in Europe at 70%⁴. Intra-Maghreb migration remains marginal; for instance, in 2013 the share of migrants in the total population of the region was just 1%, and the share of

1 أنظر قلاواز إبراهيم، "الاتحاد المغربي: مقومات التكامل ومعوقات التفعيل"، مجلة الباحث للدراسات الأكاديمية، العدد السادس، جوان 2015، ص ص 281-282.

2 أنظر ملاح سعيد، المرجع السابق، ص 24.

3 Alexei Kireyev and others, op. cit., p. 5.

4 Alexei Kireyev and others, op. cit., p. 10.



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migrant workers among all workers was even lower 0.5%¹. The Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the Arab Maghreb countries is too limited in compare with the EU. It is estimated at 51.3 Millions of US Dollars for the Arab Maghreb Union while it is estimated at 2,010.9 Millions of US Dollars for the EU².

These poor stats for the intra-Maghreb trade, investment, labor and migration never serve the endeavor for integration. And as long as the liberalization of trade within and between Arab Maghreb countries remains falter, then mobilization and assimilation as Deutsch presented in his paradigm of national integration wouldn't be possible for there is no elements for modernization, urbanisation and greater communication within the Arab Maghreb countries.

Conclusion:

The Arab Maghreb Union remains imprisoned by the logic of national state and the set of traditional perceptions that it adopts, especially with regard to the concepts of sovereignty and security. Thus, regional integration cannot be achieved in such an environment in which each state sees the other from the perspective of a potential security threat. Therefore, the need for Arab Maghreb political will emerges in order to overcome the existing dissensions and to get open to the other. Moreover, the persistence of the state's dominance in the face of the interior as well as the absence of opportunities for the various social and economic actors to lead a movement for societal and civilizational change prevents the success of the regional integration project in the Arab Maghreb region.

In view of the Arab Maghreb's socio-economic stagnation on the one hand, and the current situation of the Arab Maghreb Union itself on the other, it is difficult to shift to the level of the theoretical debates led by the European theorists and intellectual circles that interpret the European Union's regional cooperation project. Furthermore, the position of the Arab Maghreb academics and intellectuals in the sidelines makes the Arab Maghreb Union lack the adequate theoretical basis and knowledge meant to influencing the perceptions of political elites and decision-makers, and to guiding the course of integration.

1 ibid., p. 14.

2 Dean A. DeRosa, Maghreb Trade and Investment, Peterson Institute for International Economics, Washington, May 29, 2008, p. 17, available on: https://www.piie.com/publications/chapters_preview/4266/05iie4266.pdf [accessed on 20/11/2022]



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