

The European Union: A Union of Interfering Empires

Written by Goran Ilik

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*“As this process continues, we will see the emergence of a “New European Century”.
Not because Europe will run the world as an empire, but because the
European way of doing things will have become the world’s”.*

Mark Leonard[1]

The inspiration which initiated this paper definitely stems from the heterogeneous, hybrid and postmodern position of the EU in the world, and above all, its *power of legacy*, or otherwise, the power of its heritage. Thereby, I affirm the qualitative, historical basis, upon which the EU *could impose its model of functioning on the rest of the world, especially through its former colonies*, in a quiet, latent, and cooperative manner. That historical basis, actually encompasses the imperial, colonial past of the old European states, and undoubtedly legitimizes the process of ideologization / influencing of the world. Through the colonization of the continents, these European states imposed all of their spirit and worldviews on the occupied and colonized territories, and thusly, from this perspective, they’ve unconsciously secured the necessary basis for their second coming on the global scene, but this time not in the role of conquerors or colonizers, but in the form of a **neo-European liberal Reconquista**, doing so while holding proudly the flag of the new “non-imperial empire”, or the flag of the EU, seen as a **union of interfering empires**, i.e., a union of former imperialist / colonialist states, which as part of the institutions and structures of the EU *this time mutually, commonly, with one single goal, will practice their external-political power*, especially in the part of imposing its model of functioning to the world. Namely, when I speak about the *imperial nature* of the EU, then I immediately call to mind the “emperor Barroso”, who on one occasion defined the EU as the “non-imperial empire”, which exists in a post-imperial world, or through his words:

“We are a very special construction unique in the history of mankind (...) Sometimes I like to compare the EU as a creation to the organization of empire. We have the dimension of empire (...) We have 27 countries that fully decided to work together and to pool their sovereignty. I believe it is a great construction and we should be proud of it”.[2]

Analyzing the quote in question, one could come to the conclusion that the EU represents, with certainty and without the least of idealism, a specific, *sui generis* legal-political construction, or a construction which deeply within, harmonizes and absolves (or at least tends to do so) the differences of its member states, and its neighborhood, including the “troublesome” Balkans. For this purpose, its uniqueness is given as a *virtuous exemplar* (according to Romano Prodi) of man’s achievement on building institutions and structures, whose goal is the **interference of the interests** of the states in order for peace to be retained, while securing economic progress and prosperity.

When Barroso speaks of the identicalness of the EU, in terms of the organizational structure, with that of an empire, it can be noted that the EU as such, given its normative complexity and territorial reach, definitely hints at its similarities with an empire. But what is actually mine scientific interest, and has previously been interpreted through the syntagma: “**the EU as a union of interfering empires**”, is exactly the ex-colonial profiling of its member states. The idea of this qualification is to score on the historical potential (or ties) which the EU has, “thanks” to its member states, and their dark, colonial past. The effectuation of such an *intra-interfering Union with external implications* actually presupposes the existence of an informal means of mobilization of the overall historical potential of each member state separately, aimed at affirming, promoting, and above all, *applying the European design on a*

The European Union: A Union of Interfering Empires

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global scale. The mobilization of the colonial inheritance represents a qualitative basis for the ideologization and influencing of the global milieu by the EU. According to that, the EU as such, is consisted of 27 sovereign member states, 11 of which are former colonial and imperial powers,[3] and which during the course of history, have left deep marks on the development and evolution of humanity in general.

So, for example, Great Britain, a key member state of the EU, represents a symbol of the largest empire ever known in the history of humanity. An empire, which stretched (and still does) on all five continents, and has thereby left a great spiritual, cultural, legal, political and linguistic heritage in all of these territories, later sovereign countries, which had previously been its dominions or colonies. The British *thalassocratic empire*, or otherwise known as the “mistress of the seas”, had at first based its international engagement upon trade and economy, certainly thanks to its enormous maritime fleet, also upon its military readiness and power, as well as the wisdom of its well developed diplomatic machinery. Starting from its attributes and potential, it certainly deserves a place in history, as the biggest empire in the history of mankind (see: figure 1)[4]. Despite the geopolitical positioning of Great Britain, one could take France, also a big European colonial power and a key member of the EU, as a *paradigmatic example*. As well as Britain, France too had based its colonial policy upon trade and economy, as well as military power and skilled diplomacy (see: figure 2)[5].

Apart from Britain and France, we could also single out Spain (see: figure 3)[6] and Portugal (see: figure 4)[7], which with their existence and functioning have not only left significant marks on the development of civilization and the course of history, but were also the first to “discover” the attractiveness of colonies and the benefits of colonial policies through creating the first global empire in the world, embodied in the Iberian Union (from 1580 to 1640 AD).[8]

The presented colonial maps of parts of today’s member states of the EU, chosen of course as paradigmatic examples to elaborate on, in the context of this paper, are actually a geopolitical, and undoubtedly a geo-economical foundation for the development of the concept of the EU as a union of interfering empires, because today, through the *Commonwealth of Nations*,[9] the British colonial empire articulates its postcolonial rule and undisputed influence through its former dominions and colonies, all of which members of it, with the exception of the USA. As a consequence of the centuries-long colonial policy, the global domination of the English language as well its use as a *lingua franca* worldwide can be highlighted, stemming of course from the number of Britain’s former colonies, and the undisputed success of its most successful colony – the USA. France too has been managing to sustain its influence over its former colonial territories through effectuating them, despite the fact they are already sovereign countries. The same countries are now associated through the *International Organization of the Francophonie*,[10] regardless of whether those countries use French as an originary, administrative, or cultural language (in this respect, the International Organization of the Francophonie is the largest global linguistic organization). Still, the French influence, be it on a minimal (friendly) scale, can still be treated as relevant.

The same goes for Portugal, only via the *Community of Portuguese Language Countries*,[11] as well as Spain with its *Latin Union*,[12] uniting around itself the peoples and countries where Spanish is spoken today.

From these paradigmatic examples, comes the operationalization of the term “interfering empires”. The interferency, through these examples, can firstly be seen in the reach of the colonial powers in question (today member states of the EU) throughout the world, and their territorial (geographic) interference. Better said, when all of these colonial territories, i.e. their maps, would be put together, it could easily be ascertained that they all interfere with one another, firstly from a geographic point of view, and secondly from a political viewpoint, through the possibility for exploiting the old and traditional ties between the member states of the EU and their former colonies and dominions, naturally within the EU’s system. Having that in mind, the EU, consisted of its member states or former colonial powers,

The European Union: A Union of Interfering Empires

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undoubtedly represents the *first (absolute) global empire*, which definitely represents a legitimation for raising the process of ideologization on the global milieu. Namely, through the ideological mobilization of the former colonies, by all means on an even basis, as equal and sovereign countries, the members of the EU need to make efforts so that each one of them individually mobilizes “**its own**” ties, in the direction of *applying the European model / design*, firmly affirming and applying the European *raison de valeur*, or the *European value interest* upon them.[13]

Which means, the point of this discourse, is exactly the practicing of a particular activity by every European member state, in the direction of ideologization / influencing of its “own territories”, i.e. spheres of influence, lead by the need and immanence for applying the European design on a global scale, as an act of ideologization on the global milieu. In such a manner, and at a determined rate, the determinations for “a unified Europe in the world”, “a Europe with one voice”, or “a monocephalous Europe” are relativized, and are added up to another interesting thesis, which perceives Europe in its natural **multifacial / polycephal, interfering**, and *a priori cooperative* light.

Conclusion

According to previous, the member states of the EU would be allowed to act in accordance to their preferences, in the sense of using their historical ties to the world, and in this manner, apply the European design on a broader level, since it cannot be expected that Britain, for example, give up its influence in its Commonwealth, nor France its influence in its *Francophonie* organization (and the same goes for the other countries that were once colonial powers) for the sake of the EU, and in this way lose or erase its rich and fruitful past.

But on the other hand, it can be expected that their positioning and influence *besynchronously articulated via Brussels* (as a logistics centre of EU, not as a Capital of EU) in the function of ideologization / influencing of the world with the ideological matrix of the EU, i.e. to allow all of these key European states and former colonial powers, through a functional European leadership, to “reoccupy” their ex-colonies, but this time in a civilized, pacifist and normative way, while internalizing their European ideological episteme, through the *norming of a narrow political collaboration with these countries, in the name and on behalf of the EU*. The new European Reconquista needs to be aimed at applying the constitutive European values, as the “savior of civilization” and the leader in progressive, liberal, and of course multilateral reforms on the world’s political stage.

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Figure 1

The European Union: A Union of Interfering Empires

Written by Goran Ilik



Figure 2



Figure 3



figure 4

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1. *Barroso hails the European "empire"*, Telegraph.co.uk (11 Jul 2007),

The European Union: A Union of Interfering Empires

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2. *Commonwealth of Nations*, <http://www.thecommonwealth.org/> [2011]
 3. *Community of Portuguese Language Countries*, <http://www.cplp.org/> [2011]
 4. *Iberian Union*, http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Spanish_Empire [2010]
 5. Ilik Goran, *The international power of European Union in the process for ideologization of the New World Order*, [doctoral thesis], University of "St. Cyril and Methodius" – Skopje, Macedonia, 2011.
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Notes:

[1] Mark Leonard, *Why Europe will run the 21st Century*, Public Affairs – New York, 2005, p.143.

[2] *Barroso hails the European “empire”, Telegraph.co.uk* (Published: 12:10AM BST 11 Jul 2007), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1557143/Barroso-hails-the-European-empire.html> [2011]

[3] *These are the following colonial empires*: Austrian colonial empire, Belgian colonial empire, British colonial empire, Danish colonial empire, Dutch colonial empire, French colonial empire, German colonial empire, Italian colonial empire, Portuguese colonial empire, Spanish colonial empire and Swedish colonial empire. [4] Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire [2010] [5] Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:131Etendue_de_l%27Empire_Fran%C3%A7ais.png [2011] [6] Source: <http://storiesofusa.com/the-conquest-of-new-spain-history-1492-1901> [2011] [7] Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Portuguese_empire_1800.png [2011]

[8] *Iberian Union*, http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Spanish_Empire [2010]

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[10] *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie*, <http://www.francophonie.org/> [2011] [11] *Community of Portuguese Language Countries*, <http://www.cplp.org/> [2011]

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