

# Student Feature - Theory in Action: The English School and the EU

Written by Yannis Stivachtis

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<https://www.e-ir.info/2019/06/22/student-feature-theory-in-action-the-english-school-and-the-european-union/>

YANNIS STIVACHTIS, JUN 22 2019

**This is adapted from *International Relations Theory* (2017). Get your free copy of the textbook here.**

Following the end of the Second World War in 1945, six European states formed a regional international system in the sense that they had 'sufficient contact between them, and had sufficient impact on one another's decisions to cause them to behave as parts of a whole' (Bull 1977, 9-10). Applying Bull's definition of international society, relatively soon an international society was formed in the sense that 'they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions' (Bull 1977, 13). In other words, these European states that today are associated with the European Union (EU) created a set of rules and institutions to govern and manage their affairs. As time progressed, the integration process gained strength, breadth and depth, resulting in the creation of supranational institutions (legal powers existing beyond the state), law and policies. This, in turn, led, among other things, to the creation of an EU world society that underpins the EU international society. At the same time, EU law and policies seek to regulate the relations between the Union and, on the one hand, its member states and, on the other, its people. In this way, the tension between the needs and imperatives of states and the needs and imperatives of people, as well as the tension between the imperatives of order and justice, which constitute the core of the pluralist/solidarist debate, are addressed.

*Introducing the EU*

*The English School and its Critics*

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/internationalrelations/video/IR438-TIS-video.aspx>

*EU Laws, Directives, Regulations, and Decisions*

The process of the EU enlargement as it went from six members in 1951 to 28 in 2013 is not very different from the process of the historical expansion of European international society. As in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, EU member states had to define the conditions under which they would admit candidate states. As a result, European states that aspire to EU membership need to meet specific political and economic criteria. Like the historical standard of 'civilisation', the EU's membership conditions are an expression of the assumptions used to distinguish those that belong to the expanding Union from those that do not. Those that fulfil the political and economic conditions set by the EU states will be brought inside while those that do not conform will be left outside. Like the non-European states before, EU candidate states had to learn to adjust themselves to new realities, sometimes at significant cost to their own societies.

*Enlargement Timeline*

[https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/from-6-to-28-members\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/from-6-to-28-members_en)

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The EU's membership criteria include both economic and political conditions. Because the EU started as an economic organisation, the definition of the economic conditions that prospective members must meet was in place from the beginning. On the other hand, the formulation of political conditions has undergone considerable evolution. At its Copenhagen Summit in June 1993, EU norms and values were clarified under the following criteria:

1. Membership requires that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for the protection of minorities.
2. Membership requires the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union.
3. Membership presupposes the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

*How does the Enlargement Process Work?*

[https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/publication/factsheet\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/publication/factsheet_en.pdf)

The EU's potential for impacting on candidate states varies between two broad stages: first, pre-negotiations (when the Copenhagen criteria must be satisfied before negotiations commence); and second, actual negotiations (when political conditions are monitored regularly). During the first phase, negotiations may be blocked by a country's failure to satisfy the political conditions, while during the second phase, negotiations may be interrupted or terminated if a negotiating country reverses its fulfilment of the political conditions or violates any of them. Here the case of Turkey comes to mind, considering its authoritarian power shifts and troubled human rights record – which may explain why its path to membership has gone unfulfilled since it first applied to join in 1987.

The process of EU enlargement, steadily growing to cover the bulk of the European continent, demonstrates how a 'thick' regional international society expands outwards, gradually transforming the much broader international system in which it is embedded into an international society. But, as noted earlier, the international system itself represents a 'thin' form of an international society.

However, the expansion process does not end with the entry of candidate states into the European Union. In fact, elements of order present in the EU and which are associated with international society and world society are exported beyond the Union's boundaries in three additional ways. First, states located around the EU's borders are encouraged to adopt norms and practices compatible with those of the European Union. Second, to access development assistance or aid, states must fulfil certain political and economic conditions that reflect EU norms and values. Third, asking trading partners to adhere to certain norms, rules and practices have become EU conditions that have shaped the Union's trade policy and its relations with external states.

*Analyzing European Integration, Reflecting on the English School*

[http://aei.pitt.edu/2075/1/002094\\_1.PDF](http://aei.pitt.edu/2075/1/002094_1.PDF)

If the study of the EU enlargement is important to understand how regional international societies expand outwards, thereby slowly transforming the much broader international system in which they are embedded into an international society, the investigation of what happens to them if they contract is equally important. For example, what would happen to the EU regional international society as a result of 'Brexit' (the United Kingdom leaving the European Union) and the possibility that other states may also leave? There are two possibilities. First, if core members of a regional international society depart, then this society may be gradually transformed into a 'thinner' international society, which is equivalent to an international system. Second, the regional international society may continue to exist, but the states that leave this society would move into the broader international system in which the regional international society is embedded.

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*Geopolitical Challenges for the EU*

<https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/europes-four-big-challenges-2019>

For example, despite Brexit, the EU regional international society will continue to exist but the United Kingdom would move into the broader international system in which the EU regional international society is embedded. But if other EU member states follow the same path, then the EU regional international society will be gradually transformed into a 'thinner' international society, which is equivalent to an international system. Unless the EU member states come together to commonly confront its challenges (of which Brexit is only one), we may gradually see a decrease in the EU's 'thickness', which implies a movement from the world society end of the spectrum to the international system end of the spectrum.

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### About the author:

**Yannis A. Stivachtis** is Associate Professor of Political Science at Virginia Tech. His research interests include the evolution of international society, the study of regional international society, conditionality and international order, international society and the civilizing process, and European international society and global order. His current professional service includes: Head of the English School section (ENGSS) of the International Studies Association (ISA) and Director of the Social Sciences Research Division of the Athens Institute of Education and Research (ATINER). He is the editor of the *Athens Journal of Social Sciences* and co-editor of the *Critical European Studies* book series published by Routledge/Taylor & Francis. His most recent publications include: *Interrogating Regional International Societies*, *Questioning Global International Society* (editor, Global Discourse 2015); *Europe after Enlargement* (co-editor, London: Routledge 2014); *Europe and the World: The English School Meets Post-colonialism* (editor, *Review of European Studies* 2012); *The European Union and Peacebuilding* (co-editor, *Review of European Studies*, 2013).