

The Future (If Any) of EU-Building. Revisiting and Enhancing the Rokkan-Weber Tradition¹

by

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Introduction

Stein Rokkan remains an endless source of inspiration and fascination for scholars working on European politics, especially with a *longue durée* perspective. The publication of the volume *State Formation, Nation Building and Mass Democracy. The Theory of Stein Rokkan*, edited by Peter Flora with Stein Kuhnle and Derek Urwin (1999) has prompted a much deserved revival of interest for the works of this great *Maestro* in the last two decades. The volume has masterfully reconstructed -in a systematic way- Rokkan's thought, revealing all the richness and originality of his approach on both substantive and methodological grounds. The big passion of Rokkan was the political development of Europe – and in particular, of Europe's nation states and their transformation into mass democracies. The conceptual maps, analytical frameworks and theoretical insights elaborated by Rokkan between the 1950s and the 1970s not only maintain fully intact their heuristic value in respect of the time span which he explored (the epoch of the national, industrial and democratic “revolutions”), but also provide a precious springboard for addressing interesting questions on subsequent developments.

Rokkan had no time to systematically research what he saw as the last formative step of the European nation-state: redistribution, i.e. the expansion of public welfare. Nor did he seriously consider European integration - a novel process which had just taken off in the 1960s, at the heights of Rokkan's scientific trajectory. Yet, in a relative unknown paper written in 1975 on the structuring of political arenas, Rokkan formulated a short, but crystal clear argument which linked, precisely, the welfare state and European integration². In his view, the nationalization of the citizenry inherent in the democratic welfare state was going to “set definite limits” to internationalization and Europeanization. Stretching a bit my language –for

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² The paper was written in English for an IPSA seminar held in Paris in January 1975. In published form, it only appeared in Italian (Rokkan, 1975), thus went largely unnoticed at the time. Some excerpts of that paper have been re-assembled by Flora et al, 1999.

the sake of argument and debate - Rokkan's reasoning might be defined as a sort of "impossibility theorem". In the context of his theory, after the full-fledged consolidation of the nation-state and territorial identities, there was no space for taking further steps and building a supranational political entity founded on "a genuine community of trust".

The aim of this paper is to revisit Rokkan's impossibility theorem. The last four decades have severely tested the limits of both nation-based solidarity and EU building. With the benefit of hindsight, what can we say about the predictive validity of the theorem? Has it been disproved or vindicated? The next sections will discuss such questions. After summarizing in brief the tenets of Rokkan's theory (section 1), I will bring ammunition, first, in support for (early) disproof (section 2) and, second, for (delayed) vindication (section 3). In the last section, I will suggest some corrections to the Rokkanian perspective with a view to making it more suitable for *prospective* – in addition to *retrospective* – analysis, and thus to mobilize it once again for speculating about the future of Europe (Conclusions).

Bounded Structuring and the "impossibility theorem"

How were the European states and nations "built"? How did they get to be pieced together and turn into relatively orderly systems, novel and distinct from the pre-existing imperial configurations? Drawing on a wealth of both detail-rich historical literature and concept-dense social theory, Rokkan laboriously weaved together a theoretical framework for addressing such grand questions, a framework in which the notions of boundaries and structuring occupy a central role. In a book published in 2005, I combined the two concepts in the notion of "bounded structuring" (Ferrera, 2005). Let me briefly illustrate this notion and spell out the underlying causal implications.

The concept of *structuring* (i.e. of structure formation) connotes the stabilization of social interactions and institutional forms within a given territorial community through the creation of specific coalitions among actors, social and political organizations and government institutions. In the wake of some critical historical junctures, European center-periphery structures and cleavage structures got "crystallized" or "frozen", i.e. they came to be embedded in, and supported by, a particularly dense network of organizations (especially corporate and partisan organizations, but also service bureaucracies), whose main effect was (and still largely is), precisely, that of reproducing the structures themselves. Structuring processes are typically associated with the presence (introduction, modification, removal) of *boundaries* – the second fundamental concept. "Boundary" has a very abstract connotation: it identifies virtually any kind of marker of a distinctive condition, relevant for the life chances of a territorial collectivity and perceived as such by

the collectivity itself. In line with the tradition of Max Weber, boundaries are fundamental mechanisms of social closure and thus sources of group formation, instruments for resource allocation and at the same time potential targets of contention.

The creation and consolidation of boundaries was a prime ingredient of state formation and nation building in modern Europe. State boundaries partitioned the continental territory into separate political formations (*politische Verbände*, to use Weber's terminology), upheld by the monopolization of coercive resources: these enclosed political formations "internalized" pre-existing structures and gradually nationalized the configuration of actors and institutions. Though operating under the constraints of historical legacies and geography, the different modes of boundary building offered to center-forming elites a menu of different strategies, each with different implications for the configuration of social and political resources inside the state territory. It was through boundary-setting that European states and nations were built.

In order to unravel the internal logic of bounded structuring, Rokkan built on the work of Albert O. Hirschman (1970) and conceptualized the process in terms of an interdependence between the external closure of a given space and its internal differentiation. Historically, state formation (nation building and later also democratization and redistribution) implied a gradual foreclosure of exit/entry options for actors and resources, the establishment of "system maintenance" institutions capable of eliciting domestic loyalty and the provision of channels for internal voice, i.e. claims addressed to national centers (their authorities) from social and geographical peripheries (their actors). The locking-in of resources and actors in a bounded space "domesticated" the latter's strategies, focused them towards central elites (somehow forcing them, in turn, to become responsive to pressures from below), encouraged the formation of new organizational vehicles for the exercise of voice and the strengthening of loyalty and, as a consequence of all this, sparked off processes of territorial "system building" .

Figure 1 visualizes the hierarchical links on the ladder of abstraction among the basic concepts employed by Rokkan to analyze European political developments. Bounded structuring is (in my interpretation, at least) the most general macro-process, connoting the internal differentiation of a given space in the wake of external closure. System building is a specific type of differentiation, which is accompanied by a high (and increasing) degree of socio-political integration and loyalty. State-building, nation-building, mass democracy and redistributive schemes (the welfare state) are the four ingredients and at the same time the four time phases of territorial system building in modern Europe: the former two were primarily center-generated thrusts throughout the territory, of a military-economic and of a cultural nature; the latter two were processes open up opportunities for geographic and social peripheries in the institutional, symbolic-cultural as well as in the economic realms. System-building and its components are placed within a space delimited by two dimensions: a "boundary building" dimension which refers to the closure of exit opportunities, especially vis-à-vis the outside; and an "internal structuring dimension", which refers to the

domestication of center-periphery and cleavage constellations and the process of institutional differentiation. “Voice” is placed along this latter dimension, as institutional differentiation provides domesticated actors with channels of communication and contention. “Loyalty” (the last element of Hirschman’s triplet) is placed towards the end of the system building line, to connote the set of “we-feelings” and affectual/traditional attachments to the territorial community resulting, precisely, from increasing social and system integration. I have elsewhere conceptualized the loyalty-generating consequences of boundary setting as a “triple B” mechanism: bounding → bonding → binding. Territorial and social closure (bounding) elicits communal sentiments (bonding) which allow for the establishment of compulsory redistributions (binding), in a circular loop (Ferrera, 2017a)

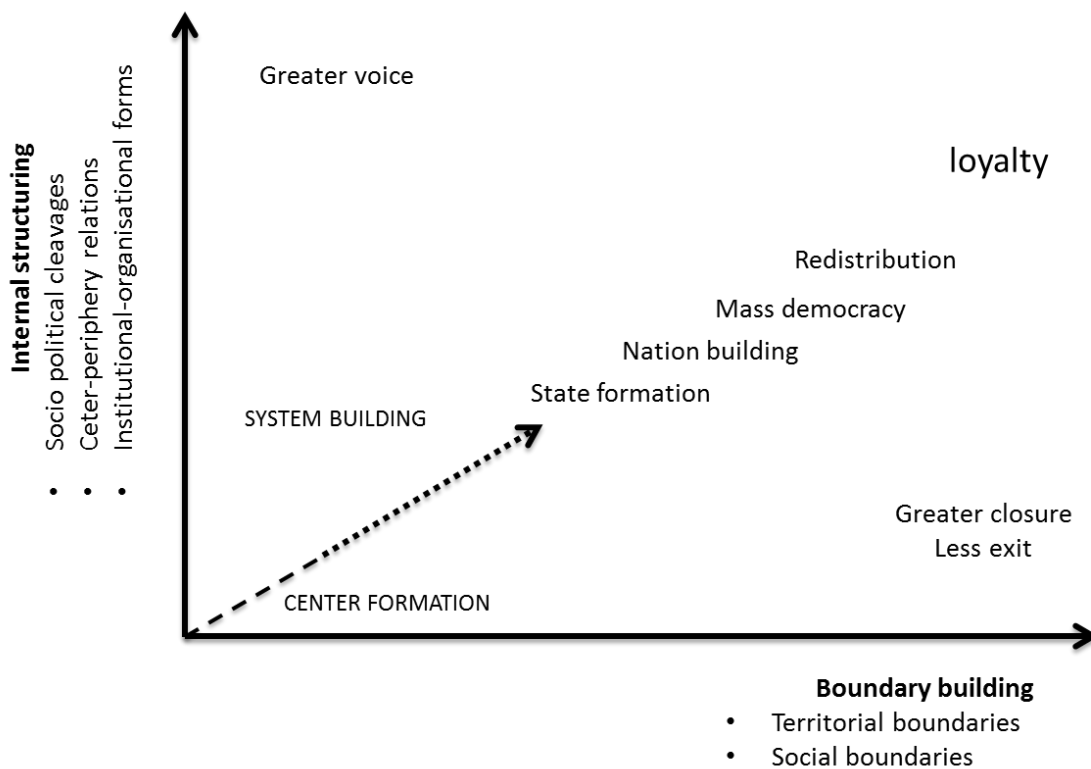


Fig. 1 Bounded structuring: dimensions and macro-processes

In all the processes included in the table, the spatial element plays a prominent role. The notion of space has two distinct components: a territorial component and a membership component, involving socio-political and cultural elements. Thus boundary building must be understood in two ways: 1) as the demarcation of physical space through the deployment of effective instruments of territorial defense –

primarily of military and administrative nature; 2) as the creation of explicit codes and forms of distinction - e.g. citizenship rights- between insiders and outsiders, nationals and non-nationals. Membership boundaries are very important: as Rokkan put it "(they) tend to be much firmer than geographical boundaries: you can cross the border into a territory as a tourist, trader or casual laborer, but you will find it much more difficult to be accepted as a member of the core group claiming pre-eminent rights of control within a territory" (in Flora et al. 1999: 104). Membership boundaries can also be used to differentiate within the core group itself, establishing barriers or thresholds for accessing political decisions or socio-economic resources and opportunities. This is an important point. Although Rokkan applied the exit-voice interdependence primarily to dynamics of national differentiation linked to the consolidation of the external boundaries of the state, he also used it for analyzing internal differentiation as such, i.e. the politics –within the nation-state- around the definition of constituencies and spheres of competencies of domestic institutions and organizations, or the struggles over rights of participation, rules of representation and social entitlements.

As a general process simply connoting internal differentiation linked to closure vis-à-vis the outside, bounded structuring can take place at different levels – a syndrome that Rokkan himself dubbed the "Chinese box problem" (Rokkan, 1974, p. 32). Much of Rokkan's work was actually devoted to analyzing in these terms the advent of mass democracy. As I have shown in my 2005 book, the development of culturally embedded systems of *national citizenship*, resting on universal civil, political and social rights, can also be fruitfully analyzed in terms of bounded structuring, involving dynamics of both territorial and membership closure. In many respects, national citizenship can be regarded as one of the most significant products of Western-style bounded structuring: the anchoring of people's interaction to an institutionalized system of mutual rights and obligations has allowed a quantum leap in the stabilization and generalization of social cooperation – the most fundamental task to be performed by "politics" as a distinct sphere of action (Weber, 1987).

The fusion between territorial control and identity, mass democracy and the welfare state produced very solid and highly integrated political systems, functioning according to distinct internal logics. Of course, these systems maintained several channels of mutual communication, especially in the economic sphere (markets typically rest on the availability of exit/entry opportunities, especially for goods). Looking at institutional developments from a (very) *longue durée* perspective, Rokkan was well aware of the tensions inherently building up between processes of system closure, on the one hand, and the counter-pressures for "opening" brought about by cross-border transactions, on the other hand. While recognizing the importance and to some extent the inevitability of economic internationalization and even of some forms of economic unification, he seemed to think that such processes could be managed through the establishment of appropriate legal frameworks. After all the thriving of commerce in the European city belt

during the Renaissance had been made possible by the Romanization of customary law. The acceptance of a limited set of principles on the side of merchants for the conduct of cross-local transactions (the *lex mercatoria*) was all that was needed for a very long time.

As mentioned, writing in the 1960s and 1970s, Rokkan remained very skeptical about the overall import and prospects for European integration. And here we come to the “impossibility theorem”. In his 1975 paper, the Norwegian scholar came to argue that the interweaving of cultural identities, democratic participation and social sharing within the nation-state container would foreclose any type of genuine Europeanisation of democracy and welfare. European integration was deemed to remain circumscribed to a form of administrative cooperation for economic exchanges. The impossibility theorem deserves to be reported in full:

The nation-state has built up solidarities and identities and the welfare state has given concrete expressions to these feelings of we-ness through the enforcement of social and economic rights, minimum wages, pensions, subsidies...

...The electoral-plebiscitarian channel helps to nationalize the citizenry, to accentuate territorial identity. This sets definite limits to any effort of internationalization, of Europeanisation: it is not difficult to develop extensive co-operation at the level of political agencies, but once the broad masses of each territorial population have been mobilized through the electoral-plebiscitarian channels, it will prove very difficult to build up a genuine community of trust across the systems. This does not mean that the nationalization of the citizenry inherent in the welfare state increases feelings of xenophobia, of distance from others: it simply means that once a population have developed some minimum level of trust in the efficiency and fairness of the territorial government, it is unlikely to favor the transfer of substantial authority from this body to agencies beyond direct electoral control (Flora et al, 1999, p. 265).

For the sake of clarity – and on the backdrop of my previous discussion- let me break down the above text in a number of distinct propositions:

- 1) mass democracy has strengthened territorial identities, mobilized citizens and entrusted them with direct “plebiscitarian” control of political authorities and their decisions³ ;
- 2) the welfare state has completed the nationalization of the citizenry and sealed the perimeter of genuine communities of trust;

³ The adjective “plebiscitarian”, typically associated with elections or referendums, connotes a pure type of relationships between the mass citizenry and the agencies of governments which is completed unmediated by intermediate organizations. Rokkan stated that “we find no cases of pure plebiscitarianism of the Jacobin typebut we do find a variety of approximations and we find elements of plebiscitarianism even in the most thoroughly organized systems of corporate bargaining” (Flora et al 1999, p. 261).

3) a key component of the latter is a generalized belief in the efficiency and fairness of the territorial government;

4) counter-pressures for boundary transcendence and external transactions -especially of an economic nature- will not disappear and may require extensive forms of cooperation between political agencies (executive bodies) ;

5) any transfer of substantial authority (i.e. exclusive decision making prerogatives) from territorial governments under direct democratic control to agencies untied from the latter “will prove very difficult”.

At this point, we can raise the key question of this paper: was Rokkan right in positing an irremediable juxtaposition between the nationalization of identity and solidarity and any substantial progress of European integration? To what extent has the impossibility theorem been disproved or vindicated?

Initial empirical grounding but gradual factual disproval

Rokkan’s reasoning in the 1975 paper was abstract and theoretical. We do not know the extent to which he had considered in any systematic way the early history of European integration. But we can certainly say that the latter objectively provided an empirical basis which was highly congruent with the theorem.

Let us locate ourselves in the 1960s and try to observe developments through Rokkan’s eyes. The integration project had taken off with grand intentions. Most of the Founding Fathers were ambitious federalists, driven by ethical commitments (the fight against belligerent nationalisms and the promotion of inter-state peace and prosperity) and practical goals (setting up a supranational authoritative infrastructure to uphold security in the new Cold War environment). The proposed establishment of the European Defense Community and the concrete commitment of its member states to merge it with the European Coal and Steel Community, giving rise to no less than a “European Political Community “, was a huge and brave effort undertaken by would be center-building elites. The plan failed, and it did so after the vote of the French Parliament. There were a number of contingent and France-specific reasons. But the fact remains that it was precisely a democratic institution under direct popular control that blocked the initiative. After this failure, the integration project was de facto downgraded to an economic process of cross-border liberalization and, until the early 1970s, the EEC operated essentially as a market making machine regulated by law and based on executive cooperation. The first attempt at introducing supranational majority voting (on issues related to agricultural subsidies) blatantly failed, due to De Gaulle’s opposition – the most plebiscitarian leader of the least corporatist European democracy. The EEC hands were unable to untie themselves from the constraints of national electoral channels and “Brussels” was to stay aloof from delicate issues regarding fairness, redistribution, democratic participation, cultural

identity. Whether directly or indirectly, factual developments were perfectly in line with Rokkan's theory and possibly grounded its very elaboration.

With the benefit of hindsight, let us now start our assessment by looking more closely to the 1970s. This was a problematic and turbulent decade, which witnessed sudden changes in the international system: the breakdown of the Bretton Woods monetary regime, two oil shocks, an intensification of the Cold War after the Prague Spring. These upheavals might well have shattered the fragile EEC building. What happened instead was more integration. The customs union was completed and ambitious plans started to be outlined for a fully-fledged economic and monetary union. After experimenting with a currency "snake", the European monetary system was created in 1979. The decade witnessed also the silent birth of the EU's social dimension: social security coordination, minimum standards for domestic labor markets and social protection systems, anti-poverty programs, funds for territorial cohesion and regional development (Ferrera, 2005). The first direct elections of the European Parliament (1979) inaugurated in their turn the gradual alignment of supranational decision-making with the normative code of democratic legitimation. We know that for many decades direct EP elections were to remain (and still partly are) second-order consultations primarily centered on domestic issues. Their very introduction was less the result of bottom-up mobilization or "voice" than a top-down initiative of the elites. But the lamented democratic deficit of supranational integration started to be unequivocally addressed.

All these innovations were made possible by a poorly visible, but very significant change of the political and cultural climate within the ruling elites – political and intellectual. During the 1970s national leaders became increasingly aware of shared interests and – encouraged by an increasingly proactive Commission – developed a modicum of we-feelings and higher mutual trust (Van Middelaar, 2013). We can define this slow but perceptible change as elite *Vergemeinschaftung*. The EEC started to be perceived as something more than a juridical association for economic integration. Not a fully-fledged and "genuine" political community, but at least as a "neighborhood community". In Weberian language, this denotes a group of spatially proximate political units that come to share an interest in maintaining orderly coexistence and promoting mutual cooperation, especially when facing common challenges or crisis situations (Weber, 1978). Political neighbors are typically tied by "sober brotherhood", inspired by ethical-economic principles of reciprocity and capable of sustaining a certain degree of undesired obligations vis-à-vis the collectivity as such. During the 1970s, it was precisely the deepening of reciprocity-based social norms which allowed for the above-mentioned institutional innovations. EEC market building started to be complemented by (some) democracy-building and (some) supranational welfare-building as well.

Rokkan did (could) not see this coming: at the time his attention was entirely retrospective. As we know, the deepening of integration has been explained through a variety of theoretical approaches: neo-functionalism, inter-governmentalism, neo-institutionalism (of the sociological historical and constructivist

sorts). It would be entirely inappropriate and unfair to criticize Rokkan's theory from the vantage points of such approaches. There is a basic difference of focus which make the former incommensurable with the latter. We can perhaps note, however, that Rokkan somewhat underestimated in his framework the *Eigendynamik* that center-formation (the first trigger of system-building) tends to originate as such, under certain historical conditions. As a general, stylized mechanism, bounded structuring concerns the entire territorial polity and posits that bounding precedes bonding. But the former is not orchestrated and brought forth by a monolithic actor; it rather results from the coming together of pre-existing territorial rulers (Spruyt, 1994). And it is reasonable to expect a mix of interest-driven center builders to develop through time mutual trust and loyalty: in this sense, elite bonding precedes or at least goes hand in hand with mass bounding.

The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 drastically changed Europe's macro-constellation, opening an unexpected window of opportunity for a political quantum leap. Under the Presidency of Jacques Delors, integration witnessed an "Icarus moment" (Van Middelaar, 2013): it initiated its own flight and seemed able to emancipate itself from the "Rokkanian constraints". Indeed, with Maastricht (1992), the newly born European Union embarked upon a deliberate and ambitious attempt at system-building (Flora, 1995): a process of institutional growth and political differentiation of the EU *qua* distinctive territorial polity. A number of additional countries joined the Union. The external boundaries grew to limits, as it were: the EU gradually incorporated the vast majority of the territories historically and culturally associated with the notion of "Europe" as understood by Rokkan and characterized through his "typological-topological map" (Rokkan, 1971). Internally, territorial and functional boundaries became increasingly weaker or were outright dismantled. A common membership space (symbolically upheld by EU citizenship) was put in place under the authority of the European Court of Justice, greatly expanding the two basic sets of rights which Rokkan had associated with citizenship in the European tradition: "rights to options" and "right to roots". Under the former, Rokkan included the rights of being respected for "for the community of origin, whatever its language or ethnic composition"; under the latter, the rights "for the full use of individual abilities within the wider territorial network" (in Flora et al., 1999, p. 172). Founded as it was on nondiscrimination (first and foremost in terms of nationality: rights to root) and free movement (for taking advantage of the opportunities available anywhere in the Union: rights to option) EU citizenship has indeed created that level-playing field which is a precondition for a "territorial government" to become (and being perceived by its citizens) as "efficient" and "fair". The adoption of the Charter of Fundamental Rights has in turn Europeanised and formalized the core principles of social-liberal constitutionalism. Finally, institutional consolidation and differentiation has been accompanied by the formation of novel voice channels for the representation of interests, operating in a framework of "multi-level pluralism" and of "composite democracy" (Frabbrini, 2015).

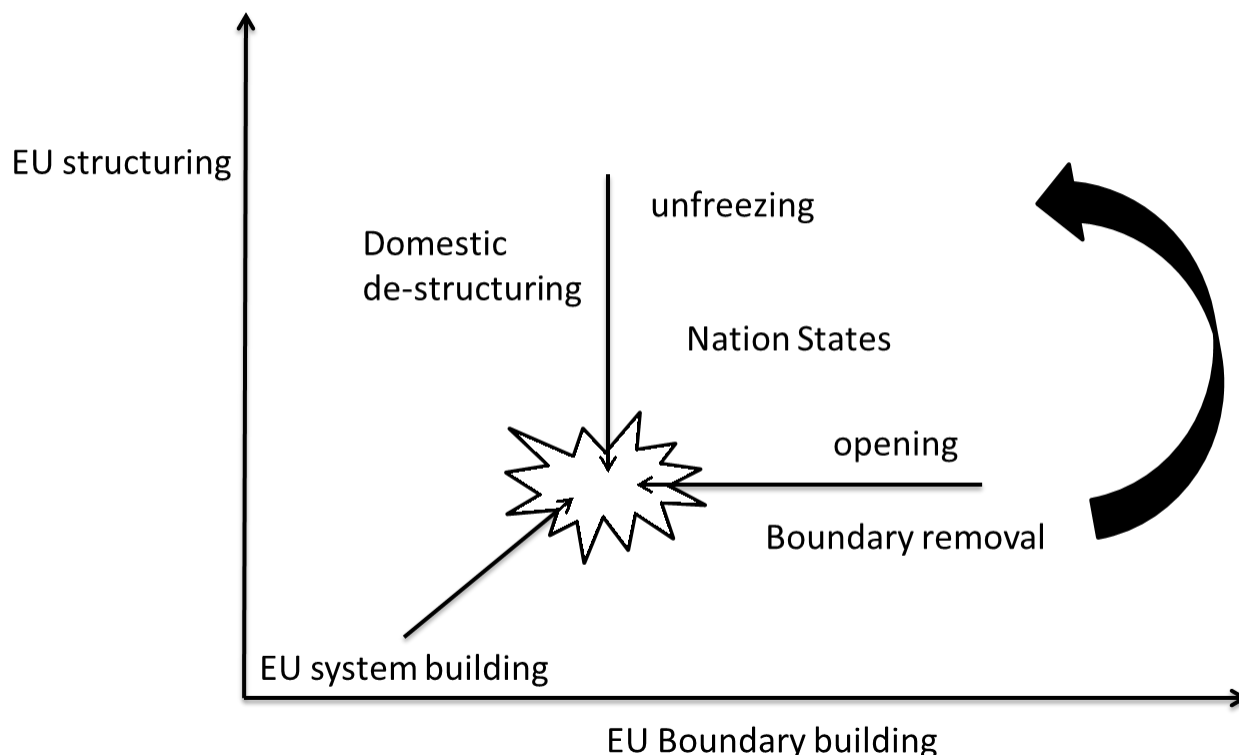
With all their limitations, these developments have clearly trespassed the “definite limits” posed by the first four propositions of the impossibility theorem, which I have listed above. In terms of bounded structuring, the EU has clearly moved beyond center formation and has proved to be able not only to fully engage itself in state-building, but also in experimenting with democratization and (in a more limited way) redistribution. If this diagnosis is correct, I can tentatively conclude this section by saying that, while the original impossibility theorem had indeed an empirical grounding in the way things had worked during the initial phase of integration, factual post-Rokkanian developments have disproved the *Maestro’s* theoretical skepticism. There are, however, other chapters in the story.

Delayed vindication

In Rokkan’s framework, external bounding prompts a cross-local fusion of pre-existing and separate territorial economic and societal contexts of interaction. As actors learn how to take advantage of the new and wider set of territorial resources and opportunities, the rate, scope and depth of transactions rapidly intensifies. Unfolding through space and time, system-building thus increasingly affects the distribution of life-chances throughout the population. In the EU, this syndrome built up with faster speed in the wake of the completion of the single market and the establishment of EMU. Since the 1990s, ordinary people have started to clearly perceive the presence and consequences of integration directly within their daily lifeworld. At the same time, the political upheavals of the early 1990s and the Maastricht Treaty greatly enhanced the visibility of the EU at the mass level. The Danish and, especially, the French referendums on the latter Treaty marked the first large scale and direct encounter between the EU and the domestic electoral-plebiscitarian channel. The Danish rejection and the narrow margins of support for the EMU project in France were the first warnings about the surprises that such encounter might produce.

During the 2000s, a number of novel developments increased the socio-economic impact of a deeper and wider integration -especially in the “old” EU member states. To name the most significant: increased migration flows from East to West after the CEEC enlargements; new competitive pressures due to the posting of workers, freedom of services (the famous Polish plumber), company relocations to low cost member states; the allocative and distributive effects of the euro and of the Growth and Stability Pact. In their turn, the popular rejection the Constitutional Treaty in the Spring of 2005 of in France and the Netherlands marked a political watershed: those referendums sealed in fact the irreversible entanglement between European integration and mass politics, confirming with a vengeance the first warnings of the early 1990s. Political elites were able to orchestrate a bypass and adopt the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. But ever since it has become clear that the “mass politicization” of integration triggers off centrifugal dynamics and neo-nationalist backlashes.

Figure 2 offers a visualization of the complex dynamics linking Rokkan's basic model of national bounded structuring with EU building. The latter may, in principle, be conceptualized as a novel higher order process of boundary reconfiguration and internal re-structuring. In this case, however, supranational system building can only take place at the expenses of national systems. For the latter, EU building works, as it were, as state-building in reverse. In this case, Rokkan's theory predicts "destructuring". This general process implies an "unfreezing" of pre-existing voice channels and organizations and a de-stabilization of the underlying center-periphery and cleavage constellations.



The reformulation (and broad generalization) of Rokkan's theory in the face of EU-building has been clearly provided by Stefano Bartolini's volume on *Structuring Europe* (Bartolini, 2005). His message is clear: institutional democratization and the direct connection between the dynamics of supranational integration and those of national mass politics are deemed to generate an "explosive mixture of problems" (p.409). The main reason for this is that, in its present configuration, the EU lacks elementary (let alone effective) capacities of political structuring. The Union has centralized a growing number of governing functions, but has not been able to elicit new loyalties among its citizens. Even worse, its rule making is undermining national mechanisms of legitimation and representation, thus creating fertile grounds for the emergence of

a dangerous destructuring spiral, which Bartolini's book has extensively discussed, concentrating in particular on the period between the mid 1980s and the early 2000s.

As is well known, the euro-crisis and the ensuing great recession have aggravated the explosive mixture of problems. Building on a Rokkanian background, Hans Peter Kriesi and his collaborators have conceptualized and investigated the new conflict constellation emerged during the crisis (Kriesi, 2010, Kriesi et al. 2012). In a recent and still ongoing research project (www.resceu.eu), I have myself argued that such constellation comprises four major and distinctive lines of conflict: 1) a conflict around the policy priorities and overall mission of EMU, pitting the supporters of a neo-liberal project, centered on market making and monetary/fiscal stability against a growth/employment oriented project, supported by public investments and accompanied by a stronger social dimension; 2) a conflict on the issue of fiscal stability and, ultimately, cross national transfers. The major divide here sets core against peripheral Member States, is rooted in both economic interests and highly entrenched cultural worldviews and mainly runs from North to South; 3) a conflict on free movement, solidarity vis-à-vis outsiders and, more specifically, access to domestic labour markets and welfare benefits on the side of other EU nationals; 4) a more general conflict on integration as such, i.e. the "powers of Brussels" vis-à-vis the defense of domestic models and practices, especially in the social sphere. These four lines of conflict partly intersect and partly overlap with each other, creating complex policy dilemmas and mounting political turbulence, both within and between national systems (Ferrera, 2017b).

At this point, let us get back to the impossibility theorem. Recent developments seem to clearly vindicate its theoretical logic and its predictive validity. We must however speak of vindication *a contrario*. Initially, factual developments have in fact disproved the theorem's expectations by showing that –despite Rokkan's great skepticism- European integration has been able to move beyond "definite limits" and to generate a much more advanced and articulated political system than mere executive cooperation. That transfer of substantial authority from national governments to supranational institutions which for Rokkan was very unlikely has indeed taken place. Developments have been slow-moving, generating incremental, sometimes unintended and cumulative effects. With some delay, they have given rise to a process implicitly predicted (*a contrario*, precisely) by Rokkan's theorem: integration has eventually clashed with nation-based democracy and social sharing, unleashing dangerous and destructive conflicts. In the theorem, Rokkan suggested that the nationalization of the citizenry inherent in the welfare state would not imply "an increase of feelings of xenophobia and distance from others". In certain countries, right wing formations have unfortunately fomented xenophobic and even racist orientations and actual behaviors which have gone beyond Rokkan's wildest dreams. The last decade has unearthed the structural contradiction (to use Bartolini's words) between the dynamics of EU building and the preservation of the cultural, redistributive and political capacities of national governments on the other hand. The contradiction lies in the fact that

the former element (EU dynamics) inexorably undermines the latter element (the preservation), jeopardizing the very pre-conditions for social integration and political stability. In such a context, can the new supranational center really “hold”? Or are we faced with an unstoppable spiral of system disintegration, in the wake of an increasingly loud “voice for exit” (the UK case)?

Trapped inside the theorem?

In order to address this question within a Rokkanian framework, we must elaborate on propositions 2 and 3 of the theorem. The key elements there are “the formation of a genuine community of trust” and its necessary underpinning, i.e. “a generalized belief in the efficiency and fairness of the territorial government”. How might we get there? Under what conditions does system-building generate adequate trust and, ultimately, legitimation? “Territorial government” has a very general connotation. It basically refers to any form of political organization that: 1) claims the validity and supremacy of its decisions beyond and above all temporary bargains in society; 2) claims the right to represent the common interests of the citizenry; 3) claims to embody the solidarity and shared cultural identity of the community; 4) commands enough resources for safeguarding internal order and cohesion and sustaining territorial redistribution; 5) makes sure that such resources reach all sectors/strata of the population, however weak and peripheral. To these general conditions, Rokkan adds an important caveat: “whether such claims are substantiated or remain purely verbal is a matter of resources and organization: how far can the state extract resourcesand how far the political system makes it possible to spread such resources” ? (Flora et al., 1999, p. 264).

Historical national processes of system building have greatly varied in the way they addressed these challenges and in the solutions found. Challenges were especially marked in culturally divided societies. Rokkan investigated in particular depth the Swiss case, comparing it with other countries, such as Belgium or the Netherlands. Switzerland is indeed a very interesting case also for the purposes of this paper: the construction of a federal center was a tortuous, gradual and conflictual process; it nevertheless succeeded, allowing the cantons to move beyond confederation. The Swiss *Bund* is still the weakest territorial government of Europe. And issues regarding both inter territorial redistribution – i.e. financial equalization between the cantons- and interpersonal solidarity – the scope and nature of national sharing schemes- generated through time harsh contention and a historical sequence of stop-and-go initiatives. But within the constitutional limits to its prerogatives, the *Bund* gradually increased its control and has come to meet all the “stateness” conditions listed above. According to Rokkan, system building could come to completion in Switzerland mainly thanks to two factors: 1) the criss-crossing of religious and linguistic oppositions, which did not coincide with cantonal borders and thus allowed for the formation of cross-local, functional alliances and coalitions; 2) the fact that two main languages, German and French, enjoyed equal prestige,

were adequately spoken by the elites and thus facilitated their communication (in my language, they allowed for early elite bonding).

Although retrospectively successful, Switzerland is also, and unfortunately for the EU, an emblematic confirmation of Rokkan's theorem. After the federalization of political authority, the Swiss citizenry and cantons have hindered "any effort of internationalization or Europeanisation" on the side of their elites. The government of this country has never been allowed to apply for EU membership and the majority of both cantons and citizens have rejected even loose agreements with the EU and the EEA. Switzerland is often taken as a model of political organization from which the EU could draw inspiration. Rightly so, as far as institutions and governance are concerned. But we should not neglect the other side of the coin. Center formation and supra-cantonal state building took off in this country earlier than the extension of the (male) suffrage and the establishment of cantonal welfare schemes. In other words, early federalization (the watershed was the 1848 constitution, which built however on previous supra-cantonal institutions) did not violate the impossibility theorem, as in the case of EU system-building.

From a "political process" perspective, the two historical factors highlighted by Rokkan in relation to Swiss federalization do provide some promising insights for EU building. After all, also in the Union many oppositions crisscross each other, national languages have equal dignity and a lingua franca – English – facilitates (elite) communication and bonding. As shown in the previous sections, European system building has already centralized significant financial and organizational resources. It is true that the orders of magnitude are tiny. But this element should not be overestimated, let alone dramatized. The common budget is indeed very small (1% of the total GEUP), but the right to extract dedicated resource is a formalized prerogative of the EU, with no temporal limits. In Switzerland, to this day the *Bund's* taxing powers need to be periodically reconfirmed by the citizens through a national referendum. In its turn, the supremacy of EU law as well as its scope – controlling for policy sector – is higher than in Switzerland. The EU problem lies less, I believe, in resources and organization *per se* than in the logic which inspires their use – within the greater institutional and policy design of the Union's political system. Regardless of its genetic drivers, the new conflict constellation which I have briefly described above signals an increased distrust in the "efficiency and fairness" of the EU government. What is explicitly and vocally challenged by Eurosceptic formations is, precisely, the Union's claim to represent common interests and general solidarity. As regards the former, the main indictment is that "opening" and EMU have become a threat for the economic and social security of national citizens, do not create growth and jobs and generate asymmetric advantages among the member states. Furthermore, instead of being constructed from below (the citizenry), the common interest is unilaterally decided at the top, mainly by unelected elites. As regards solidarity, the indictment is that the EU not only lacks a caring face, but that it undermines national sharing models and employment structures.

Should we then conclude that the EU is trapped inside the impossibility theorem? That even prudent modes and forms of political federalization are deemed to fail under the counter-pressures that they themselves inevitably generate, in line with Rokkan's expectations? An increasing number of scholars now share this view, even if their starting points are not necessarily Rokkanian (Scharpf, 2010 and 2016; Streeck, 2014) Let me try to escape from this theoretical predicament by loosening up some elements of the Rokkanian framework.

From impossibilities to possibilities

Introducing the impossibility theorem at the beginning of this paper, I did warn that I was stretching a bit my language. Rokkan did not say that Europeanisation was "impossible", but only that it was going to prove "very difficult". There is no programmatic or built-in determinism in the theory of Rokkan. He explicitly distanced himself from economic functionalism and argued that his model of Europe sought to combine the tradition of Marx with those of Weber and Durkheim. In his work, however, he largely neglected the role of actors and choices in historical contingencies. From Weber he derived the idea of the "political sub-system" as an autonomous order, with specific boundaries and evolutionary rhythms. He remained however anchored to the Parsonian view of an "equal weight" among sub-systems. And occasionally, Rokkan's language did slip towards functional determinism: "the fate of a particular territory and its institutions *is determined* [my italics] through processes of interaction among the sub-systems, across their boundaries" (Flora, 1999, p. 141). Charles Tilly was among the first to criticize the low degree of internal dynamism and the structural bias of Rokkan's approach (Tilly, 1990). Both criticism are certainly legitimate. But as aptly noted by Flora, Rokkan was interested in what he called *retrospective diachronics*: "given an observed contrast in the values of variables at time t_x , what combination of variables for earlier phases t_{x-1} , t_{x-2} etc. can best account for these differences?" (15). He was not equally interested in transition process, which requires *prospective diachronics*, i.e. the identification of developmental possibilities that is, the identification of developmental alternatives within extant macro-constellations and of the contingent options available for situated actors on whose choices historical change ultimately hinges.

Figure 3 shows how the Rokkanian framework can be reformulated in a prospective direction. The starting point is still structural: historical change takes place within 'structured constellations' populated with institutions, political and social organized groups, established practices and ideational frames, cleavage and center-periphery structures. The overall substantive profile of such constellations originates broad constraints and opportunities: certain paths of developments are foreclosed, other are favoured. At the edges, so to speak, of a given structured

Figure 3. Historical change between structures and choices.



constellation, there is, however, a ‘possibility space’, i.e. a plastic frontier where all forms of conflict take place (social, political, institutional, ideational and so on) and where alternatives and options for future developments take shape (say: deepening as opposed to widening of integration; deepening through supranational as opposed to intergovernmental arrangements and so on). Political actors move within this possibility space and, with their choices, serve as “ferryman” who transform one possibility (among the many) into actual reality, thus bringing about historical change. The task of prospective analysis is that of formulating grounded possibility judgements (i.e. are developments A, B, or C plausibly feasible, given the status quo?), starting from structural constraints and opportunities, proceeding to examine the available alternatives and options confronting each other within the conflict-ridden possibility space and then closing in, as much as possible, towards those near surroundings that shape actor motivations and decisions.

The notions of possibility spaces and possibility judgements is not taken from Rokkan, but from Max Weber. As I have argued elsewhere, Weber’s theory can provide us with precious analytical tools and theoretical insights for studying the EU and in particular for enriching the Rokkanian framework and using it for addressing prospective questions (Ferrera, 2017b and 2019). For Weber and the neo-Weberians, the possibility space is inevitably torn by social conflict. But the latter is not necessarily harmful: if appropriately channeled and managed, it can indeed carry out important functions, not least to create links between citizens and groups and to produce a fertile ground for constructive (as opposed to disruptive) change (Collins, 1986; Lepsius, 1990; Vobruba, 2014). What can we say, on this wider backdrop, about the developmental possibilities, the alternatives and options which are available for the EU in the current predicament? Are there margins for actors to set themselves free from the impossibility theorem?

I believe there are. It would be foolish to deny the significance of Euroscepticism and of the “newly emerged “constraining dissensus” (Hooge and Marks, 2009) that has formed around integration at the domestic mass level. But –save for the UK of course- survey evidence and electoral results indicate that relatively vast majorities still support the EU and believe that it could (and should) be strengthened. In a recent survey on the EU’s six largest member states, I have found that there is a conspicuous “silent majority” that would favor a quantum leap in terms of pan-European solidarity (both inter-territorial and inter-personal) (Ferrera and Pellegata, 2017). Such results have also been confirmed by other studies (e.g. Gerhards et al., 2017; Bankenverband, 2014). Survey data must be handled with care. They only provide snapshots of attitudes in one particular moment and we know that attitudes are volatile. Moreover, they indicate citizens’ preferences, but not necessarily their saliency in voting behavior. Finally, responses are sensitive to the way in which issues are framed and formulated. For these reasons, surveys only register contingent “value expressions”, not necessarily indicative of genuine value judgements and of a stable and internalized collective moral order. But these limitations should not be overrated. The fact that attitudes may easily change means in fact that that they are relatively plastic and thus amenable to cuing on the side of elites, through –precisely – issue framing and discourse. And it cannot be assumed a priori that value-expression are entirely devoid of internal and stable commitments.

On this backdrop, it seems exaggerated to argue that the EU has turned into a litigious “collectivity of distrust”, leaving no margins for developing into the Rokkanian “genuine community of trust”. Nationalized citizenries have not entirely fallen prey of those anti-EU orientations which characterize vocal minorities. There seems to be a readiness to support steps for making the EU government more fair and more capable to spread resources to all sectors/strata of the population, however weak and peripheral. Given the inadequate level of cross-national political structuring, the organization of voice from below around such issues encounters huge obstacles. Even if a more fair and solidaristic EU might actually match popular preferences, for the time being it is not realistic to expect the emergence of bottom up demands and large scale transnational mobilizations for euro-social objectives. Is there an alternative pathway? In historical processes of welfare state building, big leap forwards in terms of both social and territorial solidarity resulted also from a top-down logic, based on the interest/wish of incumbent political authorities to preserve stability and consolidate the whole polity in the face of pressing functional challenges, social unrest or dire emergencies. In order to make substantial advances (modest, but capable of creating momentum), the first impulse for enhancing the efficiency and fairness of the EU government should come from above on the side of leaders motivated by farsighted system building objectives and capable of creatively build on the existing conflict constellation in order to forge broad cross-interest coalitions. On this front, there is nothing in Rokkan that we can draw on. State/nation/system builders play a key role in his framework, but he failed to specify the motives and the logic of action of such important actors (Olsen, 205). The absence of a system building strategy represents a clear failure of European political elites, in

particular the elites that “Lotharingian” zone which was so central in Rokkan’s retrospective diachronics who have historically manifested centralizing ambitions for this area and who, not by chance, were the initiators of the very process of European integration which started after World War II. The exercise of “socioemotional leadership”, capable of re-forging collective identities has become difficult in a world increasingly based on fluid social relationships, self-seeking behaviors and rational-legal authority (Brint, 2001). But the EMU elite has made long steps in the opposite direction, emphasizing difference and apartness between national communities and their governments, denigrating, also symbolically, any mechanism of mutual support, promoting a historically unprecedented rule-based formalization of political authority. Among the potentially available alternatives and options, EU leaders seem to have chosen the most dangerous ones. They have embarked on a trajectory which amplifies rather than containing and counteracting the structural contradictions noted by Bartolini and thus undermines the political foundations of integration as such. There is still room to steer away from disintegration. But this requires a laborious political investment and an electoral cultivation of the pro-EU “silent majorities”, leveraging on their potential support for more integration in order to corner and side-line the very aggressive, but still minoritarian Eurosceptic challengers.

Conclusion: in search for a European *White Crow*

Rokkan’s theorem was definitely right in underlying the solidity and resilience of the democratic and welfare nation state and in predicting that European integration would encounter many obstacles. And yet integration has gone on, moving well beyond administrative cooperation to facilitate economic transactions. Between the 1970s and the 1990s, factual developments thus improved Rokkan’s skepticism. In combination with parallel and contingent developments (in particular the financial crisis and the great recession), the advancement of integration has however vindicated the logic of the theorem. Political centralization has activated those destructuring dynamic theorized (even if primarily *a contrario*) by Rokkan.

I concur with the expectation of the great Norwegian scholar that the nation state is likely to remain the strongest guarantor of political and welfare rights, the prime legitimate space for the practices of electoral democracy and social sharing. The logic of “closure” will keep encouraging strategies of national defense and preservation. Based as it must be on the logic of “opening”, European integration will in its turn continue to operate as a destabilizing force for both nation-based electoral democracy and social sharing. Institutional and political tensions between these two logics and processes will not subside any time soon. And avoiding collision will require delicate balancing acts. For all those who attribute paramount importance to participation, equality and solidarity, opening and integration are mainly looked with

preoccupation and suspicion for their effects on national social contract. But as Rokkan noted in his early commentary to Hirschman, while opening (exits/entries) inevitably has a destructuring potential, it can also be a potent generator of positive (i.e. virtuous) institutional innovation (Rokkan, 1974).

Discussions about the future of Europe tend to concentrate today on governance rules and institutional devices. Fine-tuning the machinery of the EU territorial government is however less important than re-forging a sense of shared political destiny among European peoples, a preference for being united, and a preparedness to be committed to common political action. EU studies are permeated by pessimism. The impossibility theorem is resurrecting in other guises (neo-Marxist, neo-institutionalist, post-functionalist and so on). The Political and Social Unions are seen as “black swans”: something that cannot exist and thus will never be seen. The metaphor, recently elaborated by Taleb (2008), was originally invented by the Latin poet Decimus Iulius Iuvenalis (55-127 C.E.) This imaginative poet used another nice metaphor: the white crow (*corvus albus*), i.e. something which is extremely rare or unlikely, but not completely out of reach. This image is perhaps the most suitable to convey the meaning of Rokkan’s theorem. Europe must today find its way to capture its political White Crow: the first post-national democratic and welfare-friendly political community. What is needed - especially in the euro-zone - is a leadership capable of “aiming for the impossible” in order to realize the full potential of the extant possibility space. If appropriately updated and re-elaborated Rokkan’s approach can remain a precious analytical and theoretical springboard for speculating and researching about such a scenario. So let me conclude this paper with the words used by own *Maestro*, Peter Flora, at the very end of his Introduction to the 1999 volume: “by looking into the past, Rokkan points to the future”.

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