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Stable Core, Shifting Periphery?
The European Union as an Emerging Inwards-
Outwards Governing Empire

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Challenging the notion of Fortress Europe, the BORDERLANDS research project investigates relations between the European Union and the states of North Africa and the Mediterranean Middle East (MENA) through the concept of borderlands. This concept emphasises the disaggregation of the triple function of borders demarcating state territory, authority, and national identity inherent in the Westphalian model of statehood. The project explores the complex and differentiated process by which the EU extends its unbundled functional and legal borders and exports its rules and practices to MENA states, thereby transforming that area into borderlands. They are connected to the European core through various border regimes, governance patterns, and the selective outsourcing of some EU border control duties.

The overarching questions informing this research is whether, first, the borderland policies of the EU, described by some as a neo-medieval empire, is a functional consequence of the specific integration model pursued inside the EU, a matter of foreign policy choice or a local manifestation of a broader global phenomenon. Second, the project addresses the political and socio-economic implications of these processes for the 'borderlands', along with the questions of power dynamics and complex interdependence in EU-MENA relations.

Funded by the European Research Council (ERC) within the 7th Framework Programme, the BORDERLANDS project is hosted at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, and directed by Professor Raffaella A. Del Sarto.

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Abstract

The paper discusses the usefulness of the concept of empire in the study of the European Union, the integration process and the development EU's external relations. In order to do so, it reflects critically on the use of this concept in the broader context of contemporary polities and selected European empires of the past. The paper argues that colonial empires are just one type of empires and that another type should be given more scholarly attention. In order to account for the diversity of imperial patterns observed, the paper suggests using two concepts, inwards imperial governance and outwards imperial governance. Using these two concepts instead of one undifferentiated concept of empire makes it possible to shed a different light on the EU's alleged empirehood and its evolution over time. It also offers an analytical tool that can account for differences between different empires of the past as well as between contemporary candidates for empirehood and past empires.

Keywords

European Union, empire, imperial governance, imperial borders.

Introduction¹

In a Westphalian world, we are used to thinking of states as political units delineated by borders, which fulfil a triple function (Del Sarto, 2010); borders delineate the territory of states, the geographical extent of their public authority, and their population. There are many reasons to say that this definition does not completely reflect today's empirical reality, especially because of the emergence of supranational, transnational, or international systems of governance, but this is nonetheless the definition with which we function when we think of states and their borders. It is as if borders, thus defined, were inescapably tied to the concept of the modern Western Westphalian state. Borders appear as elements that contribute to define statehood and as elements that reveal it. Full-blown states manage to have their borders in all three dimensions respected, among others, because their public authority is strong and legitimate enough to be respected inside their borders by their own citizens and outside by other states. Conversely, political units that are labelled "failed states" (Gros, 1996), "quasi-states" (Jackson, 1990), or "weak states" (Sørensen, 2001) see their borders in all three dimensions challenged from within or from without. The crisis that has shaken Ukraine since the autumn of 2013 leading to the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia in the spring of 2014 is a very good example. One can further argue that the vision of the Western state with thick, tight, and congruent borders (the three dimensions overlap more or less perfectly) is seriously challenged by the development of the European Union (Del Sarto, 2010), where member states freely opened their borders and surrendered part of their sovereignty. One could certainly contend that these definitions of state and borders might have never really been implemented in the first place, not even in the French state, often presented as the archetype of the modern nation-state, henceforth with "perfect" borders, but some groups have challenged up to now their full belonging to the French nation or state (for instance, the Corsican and Basque movements for independence or a few special regulations in Alsace and Lorraine where traditional French statehood has been adapted here and there to fit local particularities). But we should not conflate the analytical categories "border" and "state," on the one hand, and the cases to which they apply, on the other; "border," as defined earlier, is still a working category for many observers and legal and political actors. This leads to the generally admitted statements that a state (1) should govern within its borders and (2) should not govern beyond its borders. Consequently, states governing outside their borders raise the issue of interference in domestic affairs of another state. They are sometimes deemed imperialist, a term which marks a potential major difference between states and empires. States would govern within their borders while empires would govern outside their borders. Here again, the Ukraine crisis offers a very good illustration of this; most Western media agree on explaining that Russian President Vladimir Putin's policy towards Ukraine is best explained by his will to revive the Russian Empire (Jégo, 2014; Trenin, 2014; Hille, 2014; Smimova, 2014). But does this really set apart states from empires?

Focussing on empires, since this is the topic of this working paper, and in particular on European empires, I have considered imperial borders from the viewpoint of their function as delineators of imperial territories so as to shed light on some assumptions underpinning the scholarly literature that uses the concept of empire to analyse contemporary polities. This proved useful to reveal two distinct understandings of the concept of empire and, consequently, two distinct possible uses of this concept when applied to contemporary cases. However, while they seem to apply well to different historical examples of European empires, one of them largely dominates the scholarly debate. The other one remains neglected, probably because of a lack of detailed historical knowledge on empires. Further, with the exception of some very few scholars, who seem aware of the fact that there are different *types*

¹ This paper was first presented at the conference "Imperial soft power and governance beyond borders: The EU's relations with North Africa and the Middle East," organized in collaboration with the BORDERLANDS project (EUI/RSCAS), at the Copenhagen Business School, 23–24 January 2014. A revised version of this paper will be published in the journal *Geopolitics* (forthcoming 2015).

of empires (Nexon, 2009; Antonescu, 2008; Zielonka, 2006; Wæver, 1997), the scholarly literature uses the concept of empire as if it were an undifferentiated category. There is a noteworthy difference between studies on states, which operate with various typologies,² and studies on empires, which most often use the concept of empire and limit their analyses to the discussion of its historical cases instead of exploring the possibilities of its subcategories. The ambition of this paper is to unpack a particular aspect of empires by shedding light on two imperial modes of governance—*outwards imperial governance* and *inwards imperial governance*.³ These are not mutually exclusive but complementary categories. In other words, empires can operate predominantly according to one of these modes, combine both at a time and, of course, evolve over time. From this point of view, first, the aim of this working paper is to provide scholars of European politics and of international relations conceptual tools that analyse some of the transformations that the European Community/European Union (EC/EU), as a contemporary candidate for empirehood, has undergone since its creation, especially taking into account its external relations. More precisely, these tools help identify three successive phases both in European integration history and in the development of the EC/EU's external relations, which would not be visible otherwise. Second, this paper aims to offer conceptual tools explaining why seemingly different contemporary polities can be analysed through the lens of "empire." The paper will conclude by suggesting how distinguishing two different modes of imperial governance could provide useful tools to analyse other contemporary candidates for empirehood.

Empires Governing Outwards

There are probably three elements of the definition of empires on which all scholars of empire agree, the first being asymmetry between the imperial core and its peripheries, and the second being territorial expansion. This second feature sets empires apart from the modern nation state, which have fixed borders—maybe not always so in the empirical world but certainly at the level of the analytical category "state." States do not expand or shrink. Empires do. Münkler (2005) adds that empires must have experienced the full cycle of expansion, shrinkage, and reexpansion to be considered empires. We do not need to follow Münkler on this last aspect, but territorial expansion is seen by all as a major element characterising empires. Territorial expansion means moving borders. This is very different from having no borders. Imperial borders exist, but they are not considered fixed; empires are always likely to claim additional territories (territorial expansion if the empire succeeds in its attempt), while their challengers (from the inside or the outside) are likely to claim their territories back (imperial shrinkage, if the challengers succeed in their attempt). Once borders have stabilised again, newly absorbed territories become subject to imperial rule, while lost territories no longer need to apply the empire's laws. Finally and maybe most importantly, the fact that borders move over time does not affect negatively the imperial quality of empires. On the contrary, it confirms their empirehood. Conversely, a state that is not able to protect its borders over time would be considered a weak state. But what about a state that reaches outside its borders? Would it still be a state or would it be an empire? Let us first introduce the third element of the definition of empires before answering this question.

The third element on which scholars agree is that empires have *peripheries*, which means territories that they control, dominate, etc. (Motyl, 2001; Doyle, 1986; Wallerstein, 1974). This element is tightly linked to the first two: territorial expansion or shrinkage impact on the amount of peripheral territory

² Such as democratic/authoritarian/totalitarian states, "normal" states/quasi-states/weak states/failed states, unitary/composite states, etc.

³ *Inwards* and *outwards imperial governance* are therefore understood as subcategories within a typology of empires. Choosing to develop subcategories of *empire* implies that the analysis of this working paper is situated at a subordinate level of *empire*. Consequently and for the sake of analytical coherence, it will neither discuss analytical categories situated at the superordinate level, i.e., the level of the category *empire*, such as *hegemony*, nor analytical categories that belong to other typologies, such as *external governance*, which is a subtype within a typology of *governance*.

under the control of the empire. And control exerted by the core over the peripheries is what characterises imperial asymmetry between core and peripheries. Thus, a combination of these three elements would allow the conclusion that in the presence of a state having the capacity to govern outside its borders into the territories of other units, we have an empire. According to Doyle (1986, 45), “empire (...) is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society.” Translated into Motyl’s structural theory of empire, this refers to the characteristic structure of empires—a “hublike structure” or a “rimless wheel” (2001, 4). In other words, an empire is made of a core and peripheries that interact with the imperial core but not (or hardly) among themselves, since they are no longer independent units. While Motyl’s structural theory grasps the structure of the empire, Doyle’s approach focusses on the power relation, but both converge towards a relation where a core governs outside its territory and inside the territory of several other units. As opposed to Motyl who uses the notion of “core,” Doyle uses the notion of “state” in his definition. We will see later in this paper that although such viewpoint reflects the common understanding of empire, it is partly disproved by historical facts.

The three above-mentioned defining elements are very much present in contemporary literature using the concept of empire to analyse present-day polities. Many present the USA as a good illustration of a contemporary empire. Some other examples include China and Russia, but the USA is probably the most systematically analysed. A closer look shows that it is not the USA as a whole that is being scrutinised and considered a contemporary case of empire but its foreign policy. This understanding of empire is derived from the latest form of European empires—*colonial empires*. In contrast to present-day so-called empires, everybody agreed on labelling colonial empires (like their predecessors) as empires. On the contrary, contemporary “empires” do not consider themselves empires. It is worth noting again a difference in the scholarly attitude towards the concepts of “empire” and “state.” While scholars try to impose the label “empire” to contemporary polities, they never try to impose the label “state” to contemporary polities. The opposite seems to occur; concepts of “failed states” and the like try to withdraw the quality of states to units judged unworthy of this label. Conversely, because of the refusal of contemporary polities to accept the label “empire,” scholars have coined and used the notions of “empire in denial” (Chandler, 2006; Fergusson, 2002) and “accidental empire” (Gorenberg, 2006). It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse more in detail these two scholarly attitudes. But it seems that there is something at stake, possibly normative, when scholars use the concepts of “state” and “empire,” which in turn makes the scientific use of these concepts more delicate.

Colonial empires greatly correspond to Doyle’s definition of empire. Indeed, they all had in common a state at their core, which extended its political reach to other territories, most if not all being overseas. In these cases, “empire” designated territories outside the borders of the core state under its control—in other words, the peripheries. This is what Charles Maier (2006) has described as *having* an empire—the French state *had* an empire, the British state *had* an empire, etc. When scholars speak of the USA as an empire, it is with this understanding of empire in mind: the USA would be the core-state, and its empire (or its peripheries) would stretch to the rest of the world, including the EU (Zielonka, 2011). Some consider the USA an empire because it *has* an empire, because it has the capacity to impact governance in territories situated outside its borders. When scholars analyse the USA, the implicit concept of empire they use corresponds to their conceptualisation of *colonial empires*. More generally, when contemporary scholars of international relations and European politics (but not historians) think of empires, with some few exceptions, they have this model of empire in mind. Therefore, they benchmark present-day polities and past empires to this concept. Even those who consider the Roman Empire analyse it through the lens of colonial empires, while disregarding at the same time aspects that do not correspond to this imperial pattern. As a result, contemporary polities or past empires that do not correspond to this model are considered weak empires at the most if not something else than an “empire,” hence Voltaire’s notorious pun, according to which the Holy Roman Empire was “neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire” (1756). Voltaire may have been right. But maybe his judgement merely reflects the fact that he benchmarked this empire against an

inappropriate and, in a way, anachronistic analytical category.⁴ In a nutshell, I am arguing, first, that *colonial* empires are just one type of empires and, second, that scholarly literature (of IR and European Studies) focusses predominantly on *outwards imperial governance*. Let us now turn our attention towards another type of imperial governance, *inwards imperial governance*.

Empires Governing Inwards

Scholars of empire who use the concept of empire in the case of the EU and the USA all note that “empire” does not refer to the same phenomenon in these two cases (Zielonka, 2011; Parker, 2011; Colomer, 2007). At one level, this is because the two polities are indeed different. But I would also like to suggest that when scholars use the concept of empire in both cases, they do not use it in the same way; wherefore, they do not look at the same imperial features or aspects. Approaches to EU empirehood have also evolved over time.

Looking at contemporary USA, it seems easy to contend that it is a state that has peripheries outside its borders. Conversely, in the first groundbreaking book that looked at the EU as an empire (Zielonka, 2006), territories considered peripheries were not states outside the borders of the EU but states that had just been accepted inside its borders. The historian Dominic Lieven (2002) observed in his book *Empire* that the founding member states of the EU more or less reproduced the composition of the Carolingian Empire. In his book *Europe as Empire* (2006), Jan Zielonka noted that the 2004 enlargement marked a turning point in the EU’s trajectory, which transformed the EU into an empire.⁵ What was new in the EU after 2004 was the asymmetry between older and newer member states,⁵ which is, as seen earlier, a defining characteristic of empires. A closer look shows that the concept of empire in this case was used not to look at territories outside the borders of the imperial core but to look inside the borders of the would-be empire and to pinpoint a particular relation between the elements incorporated within these borders (see figures 1 and 2). Going back to Maier’s (2006) phrasing, Zielonka saw the EU as *being* an empire. In summary, the USA’s would-be empire would be a matter of foreign policy while the EU’s would-be empire would be a matter of domestic politics. The USA would *have* an empire, whereas the EU would *be* an empire.

Bringing history back in, the way we look at the EU corresponds to another type of empire, which some scholars reluctantly call an empire since it does not correspond to the empires they have in mind when they think of the concept of empire. Among scholars of political science/international relations, only a few allow for a diversity of *categories* (not *cases*) of empires (Nexon, 2009; Zielonka, 2013, 2006, 2001; Wæver, 1997), but I do not think they make the most of the types of empires they mention because they do not delve deep enough in the analysis of their rationales of governance. I will argue that, given their systems of internal governance, European empires prior to colonial empires are in many respects very close to the EU, at least in its early phase. It is not that they were “empires by land”—a notion that is descriptive and does not work well since, in reality, many empires were both

⁴ Voltaire (1694–1778) was a contemporary of the Holy Roman Empire. He was born and died before the dissolution of this empire in 1806. But while Voltaire was a man of the Enlightenment, a man of his time, the Holy Roman Empire was the heir of an epoch long gone; it was created in the Middle Ages and, owing to the doctrine of the *translatio imperii*, claimed to be the descendant of an empire of the ancient times (Rome). Voltaire and the Holy Roman Empire belonged to different worlds and “spoke” incompatible political languages.

⁵ The unprecedented degree of asymmetry between member states that joined the union in 2004 and 2007 and the rest of the union can be illustrated, for instance, by the following two measures. First and against the four fundamental freedoms posed in the Treaty of Rome, the EU introduced measures restricting the freedom of circulation of labour force towards the older member states. The measures were of course temporary, but this had never been done for the previous enlargements. Second, on the very day of the accession of Romania and Bulgaria, the European Commission activated what it called the “cooperation and verification mechanism,” which was meant to monitor Romania’s and Bulgaria’s reforms in matters of judicial reform and to fight against corruption and organized crimes. This too was an unprecedented measure in the union’s history of enlargements.

Stable Core, Shifting Periphery?

by land and by sea. The differences lie elsewhere. Initially, as opposed to Doyle's definition, pre-seventeenth/eighteenth century empires did not have a state at their core but a city (e.g., Rome or Byzantium) or a dynasty (e.g., Ottonian, Staufer, or Habsburg). My hypothesis at this point is that this is a fundamental difference that explains the two distinct rationales of governance.

Figure 1. Imperial outwards governance. Governance from the core into the peripheries

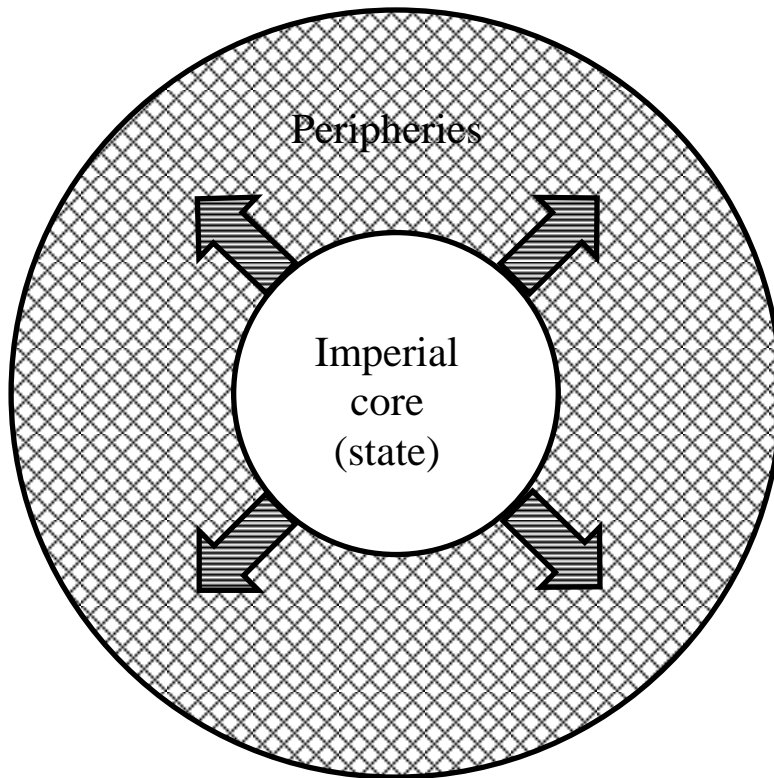
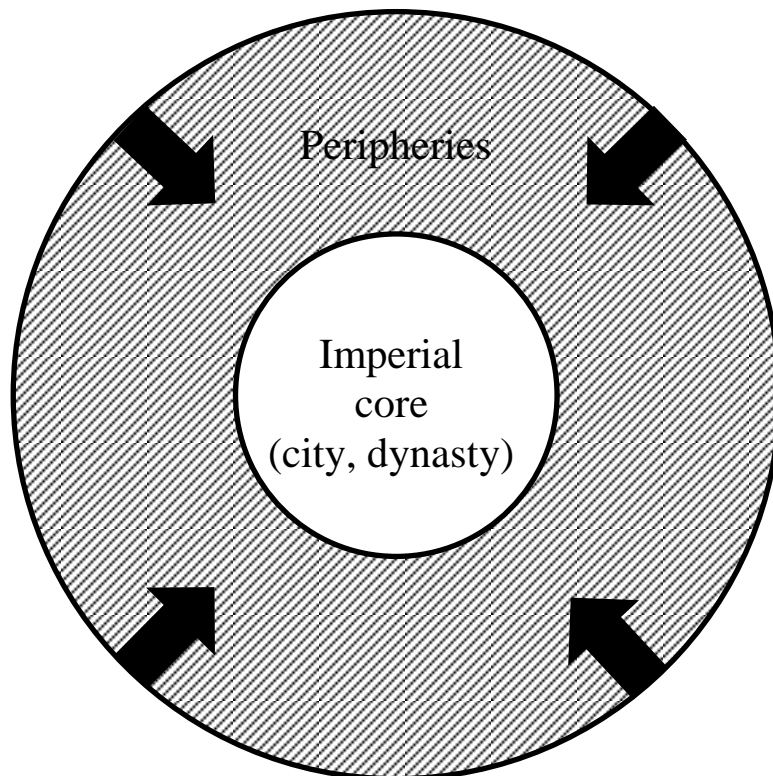


Figure 2. Imperial inwards governance. Governance remains inside the borders of the empire



Colonial empires had territorial Westphalian states at their core. For this generation of European states, external borders were a “thick line” separating an “inside,” over which ruled a sovereign European state, from an “outside,” over which ruled another European state or an “outside” made of territories not belonging to a European state and therefore potentially available for annexation. The external borders of the core state were thus the main mental frontier, and the empire lay beyond them. Earlier empires did not share this vision of borders because their core was of a different nature. Cores were either dynasties (nonterritorial entities) or cities (microterritories with “hinterland”). For these earlier empires, the mental frontier separating the inside from the outside could not be that of the core; it was the external border of the empire or the “*limes*.” Further, even if inwards governing empires had overseas or discontinuous territories, a significant part of their territories were contiguous. This may explain that they did not systematically govern the populations of their peripheries so dramatically differently than the core population, contrary to colonial empires, which experienced *major* discrepancies between the system of governance within the borders of the core state (many of which actually counted among the first modern democracies, e.g., the United Kingdom or France) and the ones at play within their colonies (which were often very brutal and undemocratic, e.g., Belgian colonial rule in Congo or British colonial rule in its “nonwhite” colonies, such as India, South Africa, Sudan, and Kenya). In short, the structure and governance of these earlier European empires was different from that of later colonial empires.

Like early European empires, the EU does not have a state at its core. In a way, its core is located in three cities (Brussels, Strasbourg, and Luxembourg), but it is probably better to say that its core is an institutional *stratum* (Gravier, 2009) rather than a geographical place. If we focus on the early phase of the EC/EU, we should compare it to the Holy Roman Empire (HRE). There are several reasons for using this empire as a case for comparison. The HRE never had a fixed capital. This comes close to the situation of the EU, which doesn’t have an official capital, although, in a way, we can say that it has three “functional” capitals (Brussels, Strasbourg, and Luxembourg); the concentration of power and authority in a particular institution or set of institutions (such as the Holy Roman Emperor, the Imperial Diet or the European Commission, the European Council, and the European Parliament) is decisive not on the geographical centralisation of imperial power in a city. Further, there was no imperial army in the HRE. The emperor had to use his own military capacity (i.e., as king of one or several territories of the empire) and negotiate military participation more or less successfully with other members of the empire. We are not far from the situation in the EU, where, despite slow evolutions towards a common military force, it is still unrealistic to speak of an EU army. Despite its name, the Eurocorps is not the EU’s army. Military impulses still come from the few member states that have an international military capacity (essentially France and the United Kingdom since Germany most often chooses to refrain from such a responsibility for historical reasons). Importantly, by contrast with the EU, the elected emperor of the HRE was not almighty. His powers, rights, and prerogatives were negotiated during the electoral process between him and the prince-electors. From the sixteenth century onwards, they were put in writing in a document called *capitulatio*. This reminds of the EU of its lack of “competence of its competences” because of the principle of conferral,⁶ which constrains the exercise of the EU’s power to the powers conferred to it by its member states. Such comparisons between the HRE and the EU could be multiplied, but the most important aspect lies, in my opinion, elsewhere. It lies in the rationale of these two polities.

As opposed to colonial empires, where the core state is “extrovert” in its governance, an empire like the HRE and a polity like the early EC/EU are so to speak “introvert” empires or polities. The Schuman declaration clearly states that the reasons for starting the integration process were (1) to prevent war on the European continent by pooling strategic military industries (coal and steel) and putting them under a common supranational authority and (2) to bring wealth back on the European continent. At its time, the Holy Roman Empire did something similar. Looking back at the impact of

⁶ Treaty on European Union, art. 5.

the HRE, there was a fairly successful experiment, which brought scattered and belligerent lords, as well as ecclesiastical territories, under a common institutional roof during nine centuries. It is also the ancestor of Europe's biggest full-blown state, Germany. Its first centuries were mainly dedicated to the establishment of more or less peaceful relations within the imperial territory. This was done through particular legal instruments. The movements of *Landfrieden* and *Reichslandfrieden*, which emerged around the eleventh/twelfth century from the movement of the Peace and Truce of God, were "contracts" aiming to forbid the use of private violence to settle conflicts by imposing the use of legal solutions. These documents protected people, objects, and buildings. A particular branch of law, as well as a particular kind of tribunals (*Landfriedensgerichte*), was created to settle conflicts. The *Landfrieden* and *Reichslandfrieden* progressively forbade the use of private violence, and in doing so, they contributed to the differentiation of a centre and its monopolisation of coercion. The *Sachsenspiegel*, in the early thirteenth century, was a major volume of medieval law, which among other things regulated relations between estates, the election of the emperors and kings, and feudal relations. Taken as a whole, the HRE had a fairly sophisticated but at the same time very complicated legal system⁷ because of the multiplicity of legal statuses of each component of the empire (states, churches, free cities, etc.). At the top of this legal construct stood the emperor (Buschmann, 1993).

All these elements point to that which held this empire together during nine centuries despite its alleged weakness. The Holy Roman Empire did not hold because of coercion exerted by the emperor over subdued territories but held because the subjects were attached to their emperor and to their empire *as a legal order*. The emperor was not the generalissimo of the HRE but its highest judge (Roellecke, 1993). The most fundamental mission of the emperor was to maintain law and peace (Roellecke, 1993). Further, even though the concept makes little sense in today's Bodinian world,⁸ "regional sovereignty" (*Landesherrschaft*) was a key notion of the constitution of this empire (Haldén, 2011). The *Reich* itself and its institutions were of utmost significance for smaller states, which is the reason they were attached to the empire; the imperial constitution protected smaller lords against ambitious and powerful ones (Raap, 2004). These aspects remind of the original mission of the EC/EU as a peacekeeping and wealth-bringing experiment in post-World War II Europe and of the strong political signal given to smaller member states, which were granted overrepresentation in all institutions, even in the bureaucratic apparatus. Granting them more say in governing matters than they would have had on mere demographic criteria was a way of protecting their existence. The original mission of the EC/EU was fulfilled not with the use of force, since this was precisely what was to be banned (once more) on the European continent, but with the use of treaties and other legal norms, progressively combined with an explicit economic strategy (which does not seem to have been at play in the HRE). Both polities pursued a goal of regional pacification and protection within their borders. Theorising bottom up from these two examples, empires governing inwards, first, *really* govern inwards (implying common institutions, norms, etc.) and, second, do not primarily seek to subdue "the world" by crushing it through their might; they seek to pacify a region of the world by other means than just coercive ones (e.g., legal or economic). In a way, it is a process of civilisation (Elias 1973).

⁷ Given the longevity of the empire, such a statement does not make much sense. In the first centuries, the HRE's legal system and institutions did not compare at all with its contemporary challenger, the Byzantine Empire, which had an extremely sophisticated legal system and set of institutions, in particular its administrative system, which knew no match in its time. From this viewpoint and for this period, the Byzantine Empire offers a better case for comparison with the EU (Gravier, 2013). The HRE emerged from the ashes of the Western Roman Empire. The Roman notion of public law and institutions had gone lost. Everything had to be rebuilt. The first centuries were dedicated to secure basic imperial features, such as internal peace and the legitimacy of imperial institutions. Conversely, towards the end of its existence, the HRE was an outdated but nonetheless a very sophisticated polity in terms, for instance, of public bureaucracy and legal system.

⁸ We owe the French philosopher of the state Jean Bodin (1529–1596) the notion of state sovereignty, in other words, the indivisible and supreme power of the state (Beaud, 2007).

The difference between inwards and outwards imperial governance is reflected in the fact that empires governing outwards or “colonial empires” did not need and did not wish to even remotely treat the peripheral territories as equals. Conversely, empires governing inwards were ready to treat more equally or at least more fairly some of the territories or populations located inside their borders. As a result, these territories or populations were somehow associated with the functioning of central institutions. (They took part in electoral processes; they provided the core with political, military, or administrative elite; they lent money to the emperor; they sometimes even provide the next emperor, etc.) This also means that such empires had a strong integration capacity at the regional level. The early EC/EU corresponds significantly to this pattern: a political system trying to govern, with the help of a common political and legal order, different states, which previously considered themselves enemies. Although there is no perfect equivalent of the imperial function in the EU, the heads of the European institutions are assigned to member states according to different systems of allocation (rotation or political negotiation). States that were once considered part of the semiperiphery of the EC/EU, such as “Portugal, Spain (...) and Greece; most of Eastern Europe; (...) Finland” (Wallerstein, 1976), have become full members of the EU. Even if there are big de facto inequalities between the twenty-eight member states (which constitutes “asymmetry”—a defining characteristic of empires), they all take part in the collective process of governance. Thus, although the Greek state was put, for better or for worse, under economic tutelage by the bigger member states in the aftermath of the financial crisis, it took over the rotating presidency of the council on 8 January 2014.

Empires governing outwards and inwards are analytical categories that are not mutually exclusive because they focus on different imperial structures, institutions, and rationales. This implies that empirical cases do not necessarily fit perfectly in any category; they may present aspects of both categories or move from one category to the other over time (see table 1). In the contemporary context, the USA presents patterns that fit seemingly well in the category of outwards imperial governance. Conversely, the case of the EU is more complicated to deal with. For the early phase of integration, as I have argued in this section, the EC/EU developed essentially following a rationale that corresponds to inwards imperial governance. From this viewpoint, it presents many parallels with the Holy Roman Empire. But a broader look, including the more recent period, reveals a more complex picture, which has evolved over time, especially since the 2000s. Indeed, a qualitative shift occurred in the integration process through the 2004 enlargement, the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon, and the dismantling of the West European Union. Many observers agree with the fact that EU’s capacity to act and influence outwards has greatly increased even if the EU is still criticised for its weakness in comparison to powerful states, such as the USA, Russia, or China. The last section of this paper will be dedicated to this evolution and to understanding what it means in terms of EU empirehood.

Table 1: Types of imperial governance

	Type I	Type II	Types I and II combined	
Types of imperial governance	Inwards imperial governance	Outwards imperial governance	Combined simultaneously	Combined over time
Example	Holy Roman Empire	Colonial empires (e.g., British Empire and French Empire)	Byzantine Empire	Roman Empire (From type II to type I)

Is the EU an Empire Governing Inwards and Outwards?

Looking back to the Schuman declaration and to the first community to which it led, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the initial purpose of European integration was directed “inwards.” Much of Europe had been destroyed by World War II; Europe needed to take care of itself.

The ECSC was an instrument tailored for this purpose. Later, the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC) contributed to the same goal. Of course, external concerns were present, especially when the EEC was created, and with it the Common Market, as well as the Customs Union, not the least because of the then colonies of the European member states (e.g., France and Belgium) and those of the United Kingdom, if it were one day to become a member state (Balogh, 1962). But even these instruments that evidently affected Europe's international trade were primarily meant to have an impact on the relations between member states.⁹ As the EC/EU experiment increasingly stabilised the European continent and brought wealth and peace to its peoples, the EC/EU started developing tools for external action; later, it was even asked to perform such actions and was mocked when it failed to do so.¹⁰ Some tools had been there since the beginning, such as the common commercial policy; others, like the neighbourhood policy or the European External Action Service, came decades later. As was the case for its internal dimensions, the EU did not develop homogeneously in its external dimensions. For instance, although the EU's defence and diplomatic capacities have been enhanced, especially since the Treaty of Lisbon, they are still limited in some aspects, reminding the observer that the EC/EU was not designed for external, let alone military, action. Developing a strong defence and military capacity similar to those of states or empires would require a substantial transformation of the EU and of its project, which would in any case be a very long process if it ever were to be fulfilled. But in political and economic aspects, the EU has already developed a strong capacity for action. This has already been documented and theorised under the label "normative power" (Manners, 2002) in various contexts (e.g., death penalty and relations with WTO) (Manners, 2002; Ladefoged, 2008) and imported in the study of the EU as an empire under the label of "normative empire" (Del Sarto, 2015). An increasing number of scholars have started documenting the EU's intention to influence the countries of its borderlands, especially the Middle East and North African (MENA) countries covered by the neighbourhood policy (Del Sarto, 2014), as well as countries situated farther away, like the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries (Sepos, 2013). Of course, intention does not necessarily mean success (Del Sarto, 2014), but the desire to affect territories situated outside of one's borders and concrete attempts to do so are early signals of outwards governance.

In terms of imperial governance, we observe an evolution of the EC/EU, which can be divided in three main phases. These phases do not correspond to types of imperial governance, which replaced one another, but to layers of imperial governance, which were added on top of one another as the EC/EU gained in governance capacity. In the initial phase, the EC/EU mainly dealt with the "shadows of its empires" (Muller, 2001), in other words, with the empires of its member states that existed formally when the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (TEEC) was signed. To the contemporary observers of the EEC's first steps, France's successful "last minute" request to include in the TEEC provisions allowing the association to the Customs Union of "those areas which [had] at about the time of the conclusion of the treaty some sort of political connection with any of the members, irrespective of their later being granted full independence" (Balogh, 1962, 87) appeared as "a means of perpetuating colonial rule" (Balogh, 1962, 79). So the notions of empire and of colonial territories were present both in the minds of the decision makers and in the Treaty of Rome but not as a dimension of the EC/EU. Those were the (former) empires and (former) colonies of the member states. They were attributes of these states, and as such, they were dragged along into the European integration process, as it were, independently of the process itself. In this respect, if we were to speak of imperial governance in the context of the early European integration process, it would be situated

⁹ This can be seen, for instance, in the fact that the Common Market and the Customs Union were presented in the early articles of the original Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (TEEC) (respectively articles 2 and 9), whereas the impact on world trade is mentioned much later in the treaty, in the chapter dedicated to the commercial policy (article 110: "By establishing a customs union between themselves Member states aim to contribute, in the common interest, to the harmonious development of world trade").

¹⁰ Belgian Foreign Minister Mark Eyskens famously declared, "Europe is an economic giant, a political dwarf, and a military worm," during the Gulf War in 1991.

not at the supranational but at the member state level. The EC/EU itself did not bear any imperial features yet; it was merely an international (or better, a regional) organisation.

Following Ole Wæver (1997), the second phase possibly starts in the aftermath of the collapse of the Iron Curtain. While, in the first phase, the EC/EU deals with the remains of the empires of some of its member states, the EU itself is not conceptualised as an empire. Things change in the second phase, where the EU *as a political system* experiences a transformation, which leads scholars to start using the concept of empire to analyse the changing EU. With the USSR's period of profound internal reform and the opening of the Iron Curtain, the states of Central Europe (Poland; Czechoslovakia, which rapidly split into Slovakia and the Czech Republic; Hungary; and Slovenia), some Eastern European states (Romania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia, which also rapidly separated), and territories formerly annexed by the USSR (Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia) break off the zone of influence of the Russian imperial core. These former Soviet territories and peripheries rapidly turn towards the only strong core left on the European continent, the EC/EU, and ask to become members. Although, or maybe because, they are not member states yet, the mere prospect of membership confers upon the EU a bargaining position, which is strong enough to impose internal transformations on these countries. Wæver speaks here of empire. In other words, he uses the concept of empire (which he conceives of as a metaphor rather than a hard concept) to help conceptualise the relations between the EU and territories situated outside its borders. Because the EU is in a position to impose transformations on the political and economic systems of these countries, the concept of outwards imperial governance seems to apply quite well.

A few years later, another important piece of literature conceptualises the EU as an empire. At first, Zielonka's *Europe as Empire* seems to be "just" another analysis of the EU in terms of empire. Commentators note that Zielonka brings in medieval empires to account for the way the imperial core is conceptualised (no longer one single core but overlapping systems of rule). However, scholars overlook the fact that this book uses a different understanding of the concept of empire from the one usually used in political science and international relations and that the profound difference between medieval empires and later empires does not just lie in overlapping systems of rule. While Zielonka, like Wæver a few years before him, uses the concept of empire to analyse the relations between the EU and Central and Eastern European (CEE) states, between the two publications, these states have become member states of the EU. In other words, the concept of empire is no longer used as a means to conceptualise outwards imperial governance but to conceptualize inwards imperial governance. Indeed, as Zielonka notes, the 2004 enlargement brings with it a change in the internal functioning of the EU because, suddenly, the EU is no longer a club of equals but a polity marked by significant asymmetry among its components. The EU, temporarily occupied by territories outside its external borders, went back to what it was institutionally designed for, in other words, focussing on itself—except that its "self" was now ten and then twelve states bigger.

In the light of Zielonka's analysis, we can reinterpret Wæver's use of the concept of empire slightly differently. It is correct to pinpoint the EU's capacity to contribute significantly to the transitions experienced by the CEE countries, and this seems to justify the use of the concept of outwards imperial governance. However, the EU could have this impact on CEE countries because the states in question were expected to join the EU. Therefore, these countries were already in an in-between situation where the political and economic transformations were meant to be not stand-alone reforms but preparatory stages for their incorporation into a bigger unit. The future member states needed to be sufficiently compatible with the EU's political and economic system *before* incorporation. So while Wæver, who writes in 1997, has the impression of observing outwards imperial governance, for the observer writing after completion of the process, it seems more appropriate to speak of imperial incorporation. The process started in a mode similar to that of outwards imperial governance, but it was in fact the first step of inwards imperial governance applied to incoming members. In a way, inwards and outwards imperial governance are static concepts. Imperial incorporation, which can be defined as a process by which a territory switches from a state of being outside to a state of being

inside the empire, describes a process of transformation. As all transformation processes, it does not fit well in “static” analytical categories, which are meant to conceptualise states of things and not processes leading from one state of things to another.

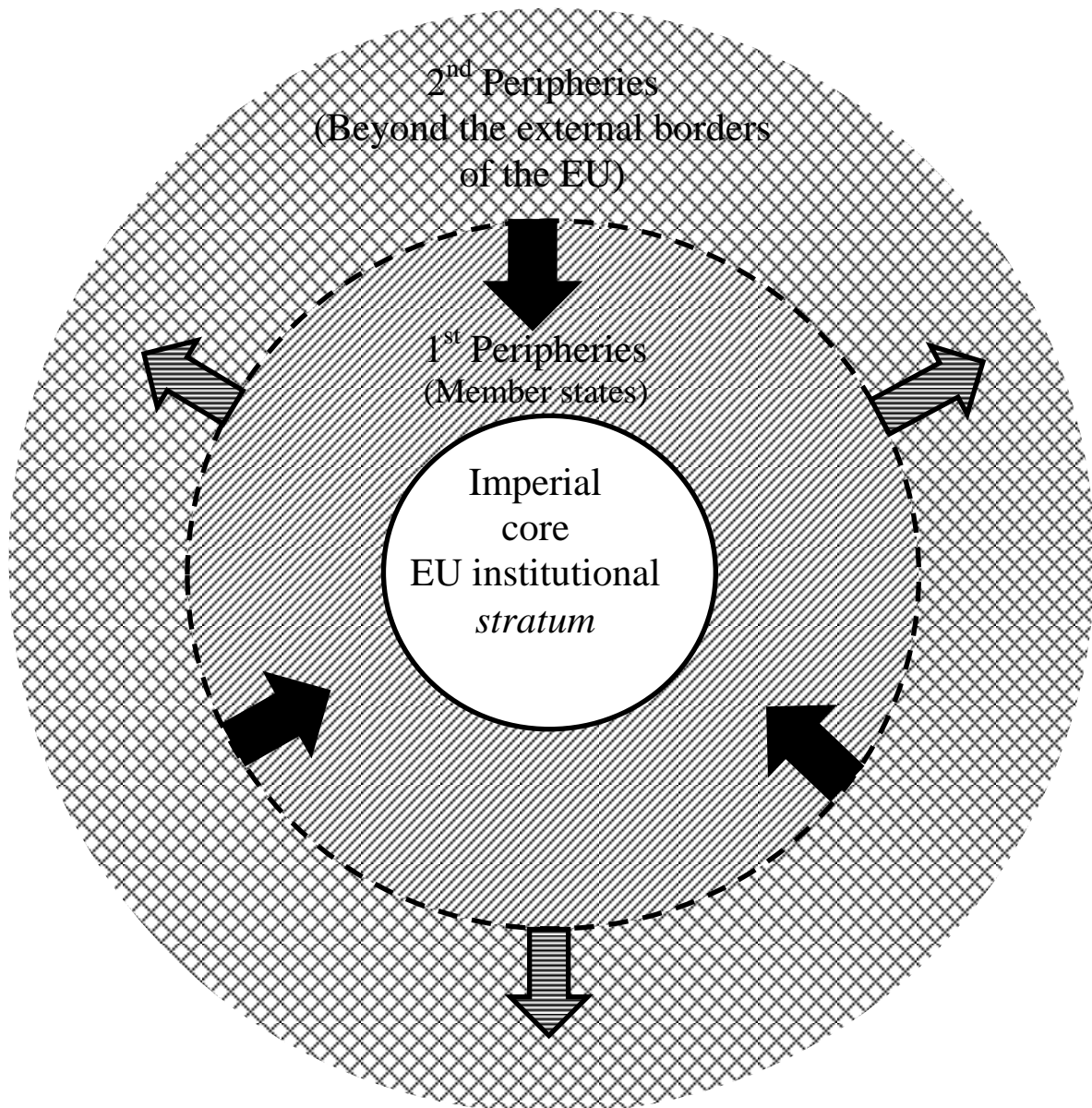
Summarising the second phase, in the aftermath of the collapse of the Iron Curtain, the EU experienced *territorial expansion*—a typical imperial feature—in a way that was completely new to it. This was not just because of the unusually high number of new member states taken in but also because it brought in the EU a degree of internal *asymmetry*—another typical imperial feature—among its member states, which had never existed before. Scholars started using the concept of empire precisely to analyse this new pattern in the European integration process. First, with phase 2, the EU started being analysed like an empire and its member states like its peripheries. Second, taking a closer look at the reasons why the EU was labelled an empire by a handful of scholars, the concept of *inwards imperial governance* seems to account best for the type of imperial governance at play. Using the analytical categories of Maier, with the 2004 enlargement, the EU would have *become* an empire.

The third phase was triggered by the 2004 enlargement. As the EU prepared to take in twelve new member states, it realised that this would push back the new external borders much farther. Some of its new immediate neighbours would be very different from its previous ones, and to some extent, they would be much more instable. The EU’s response was a new policy area, the so-called European neighbourhood policy. It targeted countries that would come as close to the EU as possible without being granted membership. The idea was to create a stable belt of countries around the EU, which would share its values and be politically and economically compatible enough (Del Sarto & Schumacher, 2005). Financial help was granted for political and economic transformations (in other words, democratisation and the introduction of market economy). The tool of conditionality, well-known in the world of international organisations, offered the EU necessary leverage to be able to influence the internal governance of targeted countries.

The results are not as ambitious as expected by all actors involved. Ten years after the introduction of this policy studies on the southern neighbours of the EU, the MENA countries agree on the fact that the EU has somehow had a noticeable impact on the internal governance of some of these countries (Browning & Joenniemi, 2008) but not on all (Del Sarto, 2014). For instance, the case of Egypt shows that if the EU’s capacity of influence can be evidenced in the economic sector, its capacity to influence the Egyptian political framework is much more limited and has shifted over time (Roccu, 2015). In other cases the “normative empire” EU has had to adjust its ambitions (Del Sarto, 2015). Other authors also stress the EU’s capacity to influence in one way or another the internal life of countries situated in different regions of the world, such as the ACP countries (Sepos, 2013).

All in all, authors use the concept of empire to characterise the EU’s more or less intentional and more or less efficient impact on MENA and ACP countries. However, as opposed to the pattern observed in phase 2, in phase 3, the concept of empire is used to describe and analyse the relations between the EU and countries that are outside its borders and will remain outside them. This is not the same type of imperial governance than in phase 2. This is (an attempt to exert) outwards imperial governance. The EU no longer acts like a medieval empire whose empirehood is characterised by a particular pattern of governance inside its borders but acts like a colonial empire whose empirehood is characterised by a particular pattern of governance outside the borders of its core polity. This means that, in phase 3, the EU appears to have two sets of peripheries, corresponding to the two types of imperial governance (see figure 3). Interestingly enough, the states that are mentioned in phase 3 are mostly the same as those in phase 1. However, in phase 3, they are no longer seen as peripheries of the empires of some EU member states but seen as current informal peripheries of the EU as an empire. It is as if the process of integration had been so efficient that by pooling some aspects of sovereignty at the supranational level, postimperial relations had also been pooled at the supranational level. For MENA and CEE countries, this shift was formalised by the creation of the ENP. For ACP countries, it was a more subtle and gradual shift, which became visible in phase 3 although, in a way, it is an unsurprising evolution from phase 1. In a nutshell, with phase 3, the EU *has acquired* an empire.

Figure 3. Inwards and outwards governance



As mentioned earlier, inwards and outwards imperial governance are not conceived as mutually exclusive since they refer to different rationales of imperial governance. When considered separately, they seem to describe fairly convincingly two types of empires. But they can also be combined in one empire. In this respect, if we accept the heuristic use of the concept of empire in the case of the EU¹¹, then it is possible to say that at some point in its evolution, (1) the EU started to develop imperial patterns, (2) those imperial patterns are sequential, and (3) they are not of an undifferentiated imperial kind but of two very different imperial kinds. One of these patterns (inwards imperial governance) appeared before the other (outwards imperial governance). But the latter (outwards imperial governance), at least as far as MENA and ACP countries are concerned, probably developed because it was the transformation of imperial relations that existed essentially between countries of the African continent and some European states into asymmetrical relations between the same countries and the

¹¹ Even if the EU does not completely qualify for the concept of empire, it nonetheless presents enough imperial features to justify the use of this concept (Gravier, 2011).

EU. This evolution clearly indicates the strengthening of the EU despite repeated criticism on the EU's weakness in international relations. In turn, this apparent contradiction could result from the fact that, although the EU has developed a second layer of imperial governance (i.e., it would now *be and have* an empire), it remains marked by the first imperial pattern in terms of rationale and means of action. The EU was fundamentally meant to be an introvert polity.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that it is possible to distinguish two dimensions of imperial governance—inwards and outwards imperial governance. I have also argued that if they characterise well two different types of empires, most contemporary scholars consider that empires are characterised by outwards governance. In doing so, they neglect inwards imperial governance and the possibility that an empire may mainly present the features of this type of imperial governance. Finally, I have argued that scholars of empire have not always used the concept of empire in a consistent way when analysing the EU. While the USA has consistently been observed and analysed through the lens of outwards imperial governance, the EU has presented itself as a blurred case. The concept of empire has been used to look inside and outside the borders of the EU. In the first case, member states of the EU constitute the periphery of the “EU Empire.” In the second case, the entire EU is implicitly considered as the core of another “EU Empire.” This second empire consists of a second set of peripheries, which are all external states. Some of them fall in the scope of the European neighbourhood policy, like Mediterranean states (e.g., Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, etc.) and East European states (e.g., Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, etc.); others lie even farther, like African and Caribbean states. Whichever way the EU is looked at, the implicit benchmark to assess the EU's empirehood remains predominantly the colonial empire, in other words, outwards imperial governance. From this viewpoint, the slow development of the EU's capacity of action outside its borders gives the impression that the EU is becoming an empire but of a soft kind (so maybe not full-fledged) because of its lack of statehood and military capacity.

Taking into account the two dimensions of imperial governance, the bigger picture looks slightly different. From this alternative viewpoint, the EU may not be so much developing empirehood as it is adding to a first type of empirehood (inwards imperial governance) another more familiar one (outwards imperial governance). In terms of historical examples, the EU is moving from an introvert empirehood à la Holy Roman Empire to a more balanced empirehood (both inwards and outwards) à la Byzantine Empire. What does this tell us about the future evolution of the EU? The use of the concepts of imperial governance opens two paths for projection. Scenario 1: The EU will develop the type of action characteristic of outwards governing empires. This implies developing its military capacity and a more violent mode of governance. This scenario seems unlikely in the near future because it would mean a substantial transformation of the EU. Scenario 2: The EU will continue to be marked by its original institutional purpose, which corresponds better to inwards imperial governance. This second path seems more likely, which would mean that the EU's outwards imperial governance will remain a hybrid kind—outwards imperial governance by its territorial outreach but using means of governance characteristic of inwards imperial governance. This will repeatedly trigger criticism concerning an apparent incapacity of action, even though this “incapacity” is in fact the late result of an initial choice from member states for a different kind of action to regulate interstate relations—negotiation and cooperation versus conflict and military power.

The last question to be addressed in this conclusion concerns the added value of these two concepts of imperial governance for scholars of empire. In this article, the two concepts were applied to shed light on the evolution of the European integration process and the development of its external relations. This worked well because the Europolity presents complex imperial features combining both inwards and outwards imperial governance. As has been stressed, contemporary USA differs from the EU since it only presents features of outwards imperial governance. Distinguishing inwards from outwards imperial governance provides an explanation as to why both cases are analysed through the

lens of empire although they present very different characteristics. Other candidates for contemporary empirehood, such as China and Russia, could also be analysed using the two concepts of imperial governance. Finally, from the viewpoint of theory, distinguishing two concepts of imperial governance, as was done in this paper, opens the path for a renewal of theories of empires. Such a renewal would make it possible to account for a broader palette of imperial experiences and to also link better theories of empire and theories of regional integration, especially considering the concept of inwards imperial governance.

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