

EXIT: THE PARTICLE OF AN ENTRAPMENT

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Abstract. *The present study reloads, rediscusses and replaces, in a new formula, statements regarding the work of Claus Offe, Europe Entrapped (in progress for the Encyclopedia of Fundamental Works of Current Political Philosophy) and notes on the margin of the Brexit item, as a concept to be included in the structure and content of the Encyclopedia of International Relations. Under the sign of the particle exit, the article will bet on a double sense of attachment: one, frozen as an ongoing but heated debate between the philosopher and the politician (Grexit – or when Zizek meets Tsipras) and another one – hot this time (and still rising in the thermometers – Brexit – Thomas Assheuer in dialogue with Jürgen Habermas). The present study believes that if Grexit had the disruptive stimuli of European architecture, structurally, Brexit claims for itself an emergency status, indicating that Europe is not only lured but also stagnantly maintained in crises/traps (in the particular sense of Claus Offe) which, paradoxically, it self-creates.*

Keywords: *Europe Entrapped, Brexit, Grexit, European Crisis, Frozen Exit, Hot Exit.*

“Being caught in the trap” – the mechanism exposed by Claus Offe

Preserving the generic title of *Europe Entrapped*, for both the article and the book arising from it, Claus Offe¹ explains (and thus certifies as a *state of fact*) his predilection for such a metaphor: *to be caught in the trap* is equivalent to a tense drama, with no chance of release from stressful captivity, from that private space that annihilates the possibility of return and progress and within which “conditions are unbearable”. Claus Offe² decrypts the metaphor of “captured in the trap” via the attributes of “unbearable” and “unsustainable”, reporting the effects produced on the situation of employees, pensioners, patients and students, as regards employment and the category of entrepreneurs. Foreseeable political

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¹ Daniel Whittall, “Europe entrapped? An interview with Claus Offe”, in *OpenDemocracy*, 19 May, 2015.

² Claus Offe, *Europe Entrapped*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2015.

consequences are; an increase in right-wing populism, deepening feelings of fear and hatred, increasing protests and public reactions. But the most challenging aspect which such a metaphorical report launches consists in the impossibility of foreseeing a future way forward, amid the embryonic nature of democracy. Within the EU, the lack of an expanded party system, and against the background of a “steep decline of positive European attitudes”, it amplifies the uncertainty of those who will assume the mission and responsibility for a life-saving solution.

The mechanism is located by Offe under the warning condition of “continuous crisis”, a reality illustrated by the arrival of the European Union at a crossroads of hopes for “something better” in preference to “something worse”. The perspective, particularity of a landscape infused with scholarly articles, political reports and documents, and journalistic essays on the subject, lies in the pertinent observation of the role played by crisis in this context: “crisis has paralyzed and silenced the forces and sources of constructive corrective agents, able to implement strategies of overcoming the crisis and annihilating the possibility of its being repeated”.³

Such *exposure* (here in the sense both of working way, but also of display/unveiling) review and complement the concept of *crisis*, listing specific qualities of its level of significance: “sudden and unanticipated turning point” with a synonym of “loops”, a “decline” with “ingredients” in: budgetary funds supplied by central banks; imprudent risk taking in the lending practices of big banks; following the logic of “doing what everybody is doing”; through “morally hazardous games”; the decline of growth rates in advanced economies; “financializing” as a general trend not only in productive activities from the “real economy”, but also in private ones, relying more and more on debt financing (as opposed to the financing from income and revenues derived from fees and taxes) – all these features occurred simultaneously with the inauguration of the new monetary regime in the Union, in 1999.⁴ Moreover, Offe describes the monetary regime of the Euro as “suffering” (at the beginning of the year 2014) from two major flaws: on the one hand, a flawed, “less than sub-optimal” construction of an extremely non-homogenous economic area, where differences are in a continual state of change; and on the other hand, an institutional deficiency marked by severe limitations in the fiscal, economic and social policy domains in their decision-making and political capacity.⁵

A proposal for intensified European integration based on popular support for a European project defines a vision and fosters the social construct of Europe, equating it with a “politicization of European policies”, where crisis offers the particular circumstances which prove to be necessary for extending this project beyond its *status quo*. A looming opportunity for the democratic deficit of the Union to waive the rule of running on “auto-pilot” and to position itself against the adaptive model through a review, assessment and serious evaluation of the political responses to the crisis, by either a remote detection of perpetrators or simply their rejection⁶.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 18-19.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 24-25.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 24-25.

Under the sign of *Leitbilder*, as guiding visions, Offe recognizes a future guarantee of international peace in the European objective; a formula of economic prosperity and social inclusion; a way towards *soft power*; a “paternalist supranational” construct; a type of representative democracy and a government concerned about the issue of connecting all institutions to European problems – all these landmarks, however, being vulnerable, interpretable and imperfect.⁷

In fact, this reopens the controversial topic of the vigor of European policy (which has a “slim regimen of citizenship”), believing that a positive reinvigoration through public debate and sharing a “sense of the common project”, guarantees the durability of the European construct which deserves and needs to be defended, while reaffirming that the register and destiny of those European *finalités* depend in the utmost upon the loyalty and support of citizens on the mainland.

Offe’s findings reinforce the idea that a European Union in general, and the euro area, in particular, are divided by ubiquitous and multiple conflicts over political-ideological cleavages which do not permit the assertion and consolidation of a consistent pattern (amid continuing and extending “the rule of versus” – North vs. South; old vs. new member states; renationalization vs deeper European integration; protest vs. technocratic policies; supranationalism vs. intergovernmentalism; center vs. periphery; neoliberalism vs. leftist democratic capitalism). All these irrigate transverse conflicts which, in their turn, exacerbate the confusion and disorientation, reconstructing the status of an affected “us”⁸, warns Claus Offe.

Grexit – a frozen exit

There are many unmasked, commented, and measurement-reassessed reports about the extent to which the particle *exit* imprints a dangerous importance to the neologism thus obtained. Determined precisely, the value of size implies a comparative look: if in the case of Grexit there is a better European placement in the course of the evolution of the phenomenon, with a share in both the operation and the structure of the Union, Brexit holds a degree of impairment of the spirit, the symbols and prospects of European Union, with a deeply disturbing role for the European economic/ecosystem. With a sensitive difference of meaning between *leaving* and *retreat*, both the *Br* and the *Gr* defer a supra-boost to the *exit*, a *comeback to a previous state, amended in its turn*. Not surprisingly, Grexit and Brexit are “comrades of the way”, not only as imminence, amplification, but also as ways of enriching the “vocabulary of crisis” (both included in the online *Oxford Dictionary*, with integrated Brexit as an item in the *Encyclopedia of International Relations* too). But, if one were to give credence to Boris Johnson (Mayor of London in July 2015), the indications of the roadmap return to a biblical message for the purposes of a possible answer given to Europe (*Germany*, we note) – “the devil take it!”

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 62-63.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 129.

Originally a taboo alloy, and later a concept admitted, studied and inventoried on multiple voices, *Grexit* is more than an economic issue, belonging in the area of “hypothetical probabilities” a review of democratic resistance (from its origins), so a “very political problem” which lists “the required level”, “functional arrangements”, “costs” and “soft results”, “restructuring and rescheduling the debt”, “closely overseen by the EU-ECB-IMF Troika”, “reforming”.⁹ *Grexit* seemed to indicate a state of tension, “a dangerous bluff”, with the call to a referendum certifying a situation which transforms “a rhetorical threat into an actual hypothesis”.¹⁰ The *frozen exit* coincides (here) with the preservation of tension, with latency able to be re-enabled at any time, re-irrigated by unusual contingencies not explicitly anticipated by any treaty, and thus justifying its disruptive status of anomaly, fault, crisis. Despite the change of registry from *Grexit* to *Grecovery* (Antonis Samaras), the first term self-justifies the meaning of “frozen retreat”, close to the cryogenic act/process of preserving the identity of the crisis and its subsequently impregnated options, under the assumption that future roadmaps will offer the possibility of separation or alienation from the European model.

With all political and economic pressures, *Grexit* is also a matter of *subversive philosophic debate*.¹¹ The claim is supported by the manner in which the political claim their opening position, of enter, effectively – at par – preserving (in the alloy of political philosophy) a role of *exit*, the closing of a book about *Europe and the Union's troubles*.¹² Tsipras points out (three times) the text nodes: prefatory (foreword) through interview and debate, suggesting not only a close-up of the discussion file but also an affinity for positioning and structure – “Zizek has always a direct and stimulating message”, and in turn, he cites and concedes correctness to “Alexis” and can easily transplant the Syriza qualities (“the voice of rationality, moderation and realism”) to the profile model of its leader. The *Grexit* – applicable grid can be summarized thus: unveiling the meaning of absconded key concepts (“convenient terms”) of the austerity program (stabilization leads to indirect destructive taxation; reform involves the simplification of discharge procedures, an elimination of collective employment contracts, the creation of a “special economic zone”);¹³ metaphors with anticipatory flavor and sense (“Greece is the first case”; “Greece can serve as case study”; “austerity measures do not cure but deepen the crisis”);¹⁴ synonymies of the crisis and a recourse to alternatives (crisis represents a conflict still underway, irrigated by two antagonistic strategies: the first, defending the domination of capital; and the second, defending European democracy and social needs; the

⁹ Gian Paolo Accardo, „Let us not get scared“ [*Grexit* – let's stop scaring ourselves], 25 May 2012, <http://www.voxeurop.eu/ro/content/editorial/2058141-come-to-do-we-are-scared>, accessed at 1 July 2016.

¹⁰ Eric Maurice, “Fără ieşire?” [No way out?], 18 May 2012, <http://www.voxeurop.eu/ro/content/editorial/2009121-fara-iesire>, accessed at 15 July 2016.

¹¹ Allusion to the context of the debate – Srečko Horvat – Slavoj Žižek – Alexis Tsipras – at the 6th edition of the *Subversive Festival*, Zagreb, May 2013.

¹² Srečko Horvat, Slavoj Žižek, *Ce vrea Europa? Uniunea și necazurile cu ea* [What does Europe want? The Union and its Discontents], Idea Design & Print Publishing House, Cluj, 2014.

¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

alternative lies in the protection of European financial speculation capital, an exit from excessive monetarism and authoritarian fiscal policies through a new development plan which appeals to social benefits).¹⁵

Zizek reconfirms the contaminating method of *exit* (“Greece is no exception. It is one of the main testing grounds of a new socioeconomic model, with potentially unlimited applicability”)¹⁶ and insists upon the three variations (false, forged, but also unfit) on the topic of the crisis: firstly, the German-European system of over eliciting the need for financial discipline and strict control; secondly, the Greek rescue of national sovereignty from the straps of stifling European neoliberalism and technocracies; thirdly, of seeing the Greeks as passive victims.

The direct meeting point between Slavoj Zizek – Alexis Tsipras refreshes the sense of *exit* with a deliberately maintained (nothing accidental here!) neoliberal policy, interested in creating new paradigms for the European countries and their privatization/winning at any cost,¹⁷ relying under the sign of “something dangerous is happening in Europe”, losing the European elite’s ability to lead. In a Zizekian way, the stakes any *exit* would require is that of a post effect – *what happens when life returns to normal* – reiterating the need for “smart alliances”, but without giving up specificity.

From the area of German ideation (a meeting of prospects, but through a different dosage), Claus Offe warns about the Community mechanism, seen as a cooperation stopped in advance, demonstrating the impossibility of a return to the pre-Euro conditions, and thus established the blocked route of a device with both ways obstructed: although member states assume the mistake of introducing the euro into a damaged monetary area, the same indecision and inconsistency seems to also work at the moment one expresses the intention to cancel an already implemented approach.¹⁸ Offe’s article positions Germany and Greece at the extremes of an analytical approach towards the crisis: one unleashes the economic pressures and constraints upon the “poorest and less productive” partner; the part “with higher costs of labor unit” and a “reduced competitiveness in the field of international trade” deprives the national currencies of the possibility of external adjustment.¹⁹ There is therefore a sum of European crises – the banking crisis – the debt crisis; the integration crisis and the effects of a major economic divide, felt through the renationalization policy; austerity, as a toxic treatment which deepens vulnerability and dependence (both opposing faster growth and extending the tax base); the crisis of European political elites, captive in a vicious circle – whose complexity/risk is incurred (by *thawing* and *re-heating*) by: returning to national currencies; dividing the Euro area into two or more monetary areas; through the unilateral withdrawal of members from the construct of an apparent order with uncontrollably-prohibitive magnitudes.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 145.

¹⁸ Claus Offe, „Europe Entrapped Does the EU have the political capacity to overcome its current crisis?“, in *European Law Journal*, vol. 19, no. 5, September 2013, pp. 595-611.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 597.

Brexit – a hot exit

Originally considered jargon, a particle created in the laboratory of crisis (reiterating the frozen exit – *Grexit*, but also its reactivating possibilities as *Frexit*, *Spexit*, *Nexit*, or even Turkey’s option of questioning and determining, through a referendum, the desirability of continuing or terminating the process of accession to the EU) has become a *concept* (surpassing simple agglutination) just through supra-constant use and circulation. *Brexit* is the equivalent of its own semantic options, relating to Britain’s official exclusion from all principled structures and organizations of an ever closer, “tighter” Union. The Union’s policy is provisioned with adequate interest for any advertising actions of economic acting using multiple coins, revalorizing any initiatives of national groups of MPs appointed to vote national directives and repeal the laws of the European Community, as well as any attempts at internal reorganization designed to ensure special protection for London. Used in David Cameron’s speech in January 2016, in Davos, the *option term* Brexit did not propose translating into practice the trend of dissidence and isolationism (a concept synonymous, in this case and at that point, to leaving the European Union, signifying the interruption of relations with it and a finalization of measures for withdrawal from the Union). Brexit did not theorize any discomfort felt within European structures, against the backdrop of continuing skeptical attitudes, but, on the contrary, sought to improve and maximize the agreement established between the United Kingdom and Europe, through identification of common, effective and concrete solutions for fundamental changes in the European space.

Punctually, the following aspects, requiring an immediate fix, were spelled out: Eurozone deficits, dysfunctions of competitiveness, redefining the relationship between the EU and its own citizens with the objective of resolving any shortcomings which perturbed the relationship between European citizens and the Union. Under the sign of key terms such as *frustration* and *disappointment*, *exit* accepts an official replica which includes answers to a series of challenges and reiterates the successful project of Europe, recognizing through Brexit “that failure of Europe which diverted Brits towards the exit”, *exit* meaning here “no turning back”. This single variant option is invalidated twice: in a first phase, through recourse to a *reply*, the House of Commons acknowledging (on July 12, 2016) the decision to organize (against the background requirement of four million signatures) a debate (scheduled for September 5, 2016) concerning the petition regarding the likelihood of organizing a new referendum; the second proposes segmenting the *Br* to which *exit* applies, in the sense in which, according to the BBC, 1,661,191 Scots chose the *in* option and 440,437 voters from Northern Ireland have called for *non-exit*.

If the project-program of British Conservatives envisions, as central stakes, mandating the Government for the negotiation of a new agreement, a referendum on the subject of membership, or exclusion from the EU, offered two variants – *Brexit* or *non-Brexit*: “we leave completely” or “we stick with the EU on this new basis” (echoing a vanguard position of collective action for both foreign policy and trade). It should be noted that the decision was fueled, in the

context of a failure of the proposal (the draft of a “third way”, as the median option of viable negotiation with interest in four chapters on economic governance, competitiveness, sovereignty, social benefits and freedom of movement) made by Donald Tusk (on February 2, 2016). The proposal-understanding, with conciliatory stakes, remained unfinished and untried in practice, blocked at the “preamble” level of a real negotiation, received as a pretext of discontent for Eurosceptics (Nigel Farage) and decreed as “an ironic approach”, “a joke” or “a dissimulated act” by the conservative press

Post June 23, 2016, *Brexit* its depleting its *option* meaning, and becomes *reality*, a *continued/hot* process (resistant to any protests and responsive to the impending counter-referendum) that advertises changes and immediate reassessments.

The result (which seemed) improbable and impossible to predict – *a victory of populism over capitalism in the latter’s home country* – opens, according to Jürgen Habermas,²⁰ the folder of other possible referendums, assuming different results, especially in Germany, a country where European integration and the *enter* version seem not to have (totally) lost their attractiveness. However, the British model in particular contains both a historical motivation, nourished by/in the consciousness of a great power, and signals of decline as a global, broad-based nuance. Thus the philosopher sees the *exit* process as denouncing both economic policies and the exposure of political elites, firmly stating that within the open flow of present-day prospects almost no one believes in transnational democracy (alluding to the empirical perspective of Wolfgang Streeck, relating to the Union as a deregulatory mechanism). Habermas draws attention to Frank-Walter Steinmeier’s initiative, on the morning immediately following the Brexit, to convene the Foreign Ministers of the six EU founding States, with Angela Merkel sensing the intention/danger of immediately rebuilding Europe from outside its center. Hence the insistence upon a reiteration of the agreement between the 27 member states, in the sense in which a constructive, even seemingly impossible agreement can block and freeze the *exit /distancing* from the European project, without circumventing the exhaustive, neutralized hope of a Brexit. Habermas’ argument is aimed at refilling the European project with sense, valuing compromise, tolerance and proper functioning, with a stake in a reiteration of the project.

Instead of conclusions: political philosophy’s answer to exit

Peter Sloterdijk²¹ introduced even at the nodal moment of Europe’s focal changes (1989) a rethinking of the category of “diplomats as thinkers in poor times”. The Sloterdijkian subchapter (pp. 117-119) owns and offers justifications for a project involving philosophical-political voices in diagnosing the time and granting the necessary tones and sub-tones to reality. Such a need resides in the

²⁰ Thomas Assheuer, Jürgen Habermas, “Core Europe to the Rescue: A Conversation With Jürgen Habermas About Brexit and the EU Crisis”, 12 July 2016, <https://www.socialeurope.eu/2016/07/core-europe-to-the-rescue/>, accessed at 1 August 2016.

²¹ Peter Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoism. Contribuții la o critică a cineticii politice* [Eurotaoismus. Zur Kritik der politishen Kinetik], Idea Design & Print Publishing House, Cluj, 2004.

continuance of crises regarding what is *right* and what is *false*, willfully non-positioned, paired concepts that draw attention to the terms *coherence – matching – adequacy*: “that which has an effect is no longer true. What fits well, no longer matches; what is appropriate does not help further, what keeps no longer matches, and what you like no longer works at all”.²² Keeping us close to such findings, we can equate the volcanic times, and the indispositions of the present *exit* seen as an unsettling object/particle of Europe.

The Exit/crisis prints and advertises, on the one hand, a certain “secondary philosophy no which no longer teaches about life concepts but, in exchange, initiates a pedagogical enterprise based on secondary intellectual virtues – clarity – a grasp of the material and communicability” (the philosopher’s reaction to *Brexit*), and on the other hand, recharges signs showing that philosophy can escape the “burden of pondering over deep questions”, *radically* heading towards the “troubles” of the moment. Another trap set by politicians offering introductory philosophies (be it in Athens, Berlin, London or Brussels) and imprinting them on the hierarchy and supremacy of the (a)real where all answers have to be sought...

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²² *Ibidem*, p. 117.