

European Cohesion? Globalization, Autonomization, and the Dynamics of EU Integration

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ABSTRACT Globalization is frequently assumed to be responsible for creating the economic environment in which a much greater degree of European Union (EU) economic integration is deemed necessary. In contrast, this paper argues that globalization, in conjunction with neo-liberal growth, has led to autonomization as well as integration. The term autonomization designates both that economic governance is increasingly delegated to autonomous regions, and that neo-liberal economic policies tend to fragment and divide in their pursuit of growth. The paper investigates the tension between the role in which globalization has cast the region, and the region as a central player in the EU's cohesion strategy. Cohesion policy—measures to combat underdevelopment and backwardness—plays a key role in integration and growth strategies. It is argued that cohesion has become detached from its redistributive origins and incorporated in a discourse of competitiveness and growth. The region has emerged as both the site upon which the global acts upon the EU, and the level at which the EU has determined that the processes of globalization can best be accommodated. It is suggested that the tension between cohesion and autonomization introduced by globalization is a central dynamic at work in the contemporary EU.

Introduction: the EU and globalization

It is a matter of consensus that a firm relationship exists between globalization and European Union (EU) integration. Put simply, globalization is held to be responsible for creating the environment in which a much greater degree of economic integration is deemed necessary, at the same time the EU has contributed to the spread of globalization.¹ EU integration and globalization are viewed as interrelated to the point where the two sets of processes are difficult to distinguish (Rhodes *et al.*, 1997).² They are mutually implicated: one calling forth the other; one finding expression in the other. The nature and intensity of the relationship is summarized by Castells (1998, p. 338) in the following terms: 'European integration is, at the same time, a reaction to the process of globalisation and its most advanced expression.'

Such a close relationship between globalization and the EU derives from a narrative dominated by market integration and transnational co-operation. What this narrative of integration succeeds in doing is to reinforce the idea that the processes which constitute European integration are necessary and appropriate policy-led responses to the challenges issued by the logic of the global economy. In this sense, we can say that the existence of globalization legitimizes European integration in the name of the need for greater EU competitiveness. This is in fact the dominant theme in the EU's own appreciation of the impact of globalization. For example, a Commission White Paper (CEC, 1993) states that:

The globalisation of economics and markets, which involves the intensification of international competition through the emergence of a potentially unique world-wide market for an expanding range of goods, services and factors, brings out the full importance of that responsibility on the part of national and Community authorities as regards competitiveness.

Globalization is presented as a challenge to be met and an incentive to pursue ever-greater steps towards economic integration, trade liberalization and competitiveness. In other words, globalization presents the EU and its member states with both the motive and the opportunity to enhance competitiveness. The logic of greater competitiveness has also led the EU to devise ways of ensuring that economic growth and increased competition do not undermine the single market by concentrating growth too narrowly in favoured areas and core locations. The idea that the origins of the Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund were to facilitate the transition to the EU's new neo-liberally dominated economic order stems from the same integrative logic. What is interesting about the EU's cohesion policy (under which umbrella term the Structural and Cohesion Funds can be subsumed) is that it has been recast as an instrument with which to complement competitiveness. Cohesion has been divested of its redistributive connotations and re-articulated within a discourse of competitiveness.

The 'close fit' between globalization and European integration is in no small part due to the definition that is being employed. Globalization is taken to refer to an internationalisation of economic production and the development of markets on a world scale. The nation-state is deemed increasingly ineffectual in an environment dominated by global markets and transnational corporations. Increased European integration is the logical response to such changes. In this sense, 'globalization represents the long-term replacement of an economic space of independent trading regions and nations by a single Europe-wide corporate economy' (Amin and Tomanev, 1995, p. 33). One consequence of these processes and of the 'greater transnational uniformity in culture, communication, information, financial regulation and national economic policies' (Rhodes *et al.*, 1997, p. 5) engendered by globalization is that the nation-state needs the security offered by membership in an economic bloc such as the EU. This is a dominant theme in the literature. For example, Delanty (1998) argues that the perspective on European integration that has emerged since the 1980s is the product of an increasingly global world order. On this model of integration nation-states surrender a degree of their sovereignty in order to survive under the conditions of globalization. 'In short, globalisation is the condition which has replaced the need for peace in the justification of European integration today.'

Such a definition does not capture the full complexity of globalization, which is better thought of as a transnationalization of economic and cultural life in which the relationship between the local, national and transnational penetrates and acts on each other in unfamiliar ways. 'Globalisation is about the dissolution of old structures and boundaries of national states and communities' and the 'increasing transnationalisation of economic and cultural life' (Robins, 1997, pp. 12–13), but this is not to say that transnationalization is automatically the dominant process. Of particular interest for an examination of cohesion and European integration is the way in which globalization represents an interpenetrating of the local and the global, and the way in which globalization animates economic, social and political actors from a distance. Globalization destabilizes the hierarchies upon which the (national) economy is ordered, it prioritizes the local over the national and the transnational, it fosters a new set of relationships between regions and nation-states, between sectors and the state, between centres and peripheries. Globaliza-

tion empowers the region not simply as an actor autonomous from central government control, but as a self-responsible and self-regulating governor of its own economic activity.

Autonomization and integration

The integrative logic generated by accounts of globalization fails to allow space for a consideration of other outcomes of the relationship between globalization and the EU. One such outcome, which I wish to draw attention to in this paper, is the tendency of globalization, in conjunction with neo-liberal growth—the twin foundations on which EU economic integration has been constructed—to lead to autonomization as well as integration. The autonomized EU animates economic and social actors—citizens, economic enterprises, NGOs, or regions—in new ways. It empowers them at the same time as exposing them to a degree of risk (the insecurities of the market). It is not concerned to ensure their wellbeing in the way that the welfare nation-state is, for example. Autonomization encompasses the idea that neo-liberalism promotes autonomy amongst its participants, in terms of government, the provision of services, economic actors, and citizens (Burchell, 1993, p. 274).³ Autonomization points to a European Union ‘governed not through the formation of a European state, but through the autonomous economic actions of its subjects’ (Barry, 1993, p. 315). The term autonomization also successfully captures both the idea that neo-liberal economic policies tend to fragment and divide in their pursuit of growth (growth in one region is at the expense of another, for example), and that economic governance is increasingly devolved or delegated to autonomous regions and sectors.

In the context of the contemporary EU, autonomization is best thought of as a series of processes to which the EU is increasingly subject and which generate not only integration, but also autonomy, fragmentation and internal differentiation. To understand the dynamics of autonomization we need to examine the ways in which neo-liberal growth, entrepreneurial governance, and globalization are shaping the new Europe and leading to a particular type of EU integration. Autonomization is the corollary of integration for an EU shaped and moulded by the twin dynamics of globalization and neo-liberal growth. Integration implies a relation between parts characterized by systematic harmonization, internal coherence, unity and interconnectedness. Autonomization, on the other hand, results in differentiation as much as harmonization. Autonomization implies an EU dominated by conflicting and contradictory tendencies, the absence of a system, an incompleteness or partiality, dispersal as well as concentration, differentiated growth: a dislocated collection of elements organized according to reordered hierarchies of economy and space.

Autonomization also points to an EU in which policies are contradictory as much as they are complementary, and in which change is less policy driven than increasingly shaped by forces beyond the reach of EU policy. Autonomization refers to a different dynamic of integration, to an EU which is less a closed and bounded geographical, economic or cultural space than it is a multiplicity of networks existing in varying densities and extending in different directions. The notion of autonomization helps us to move beyond the rather positivistic and developmental schema of an inevitable and ever-increasing degree of integration. Autonomization also reveals important tensions and contradictions that are not fully unacknowledged in standard integrative narratives of the contemporary EU. Autonomization challenges preconceptions about the nature of integration: that it is policy lead, that it is unidirectional, that it leads to positive

outcomes, and that it is the goal of all interested parties. Autonomization permits an interpretation of integration, not as a goal or a policy objective, but as a resource from which actors empower themselves and acquire new forms of legitimacy. In this sense, integration is less a shared goal or a political vision than a potential for animating interest groups, sectors, regions, and citizens within the European orbit.

From the perspective of autonomization the process of European integration is a framework of opportunities which some groups and agencies are better equipped to exploit. Integration generates winners and losers, creates new hierarchies, and disperses centres of power. Autonomization points to a form of integration in which the actors concerned are not only member states but also sectors, regions and NGOs not all of which have the same goals and aspirations, or are energized by the same integrative capacities. On this model, integration stems from multiple (extra- and intra-EU) sources and creates a plurality and diversity of strategies amongst the actors which it empowers and autonomizes. Integration, such as it is, is the outcome of complex and contradictory processes taking place between agents who work both within and without European circuits, networks, and spaces, which they frequently create for themselves or for which the EU is neither wholly responsible, nor is able to fully regulate and monitor. Autonomization thus denies that the EU is the sole author of its own integration. Autonomization demands a narrative of EU development that does not assume the inevitability of integration and cohesion. Rather, autonomization suggests the existence of an EU not determined and structured in accordance with a particular unifying principle. It stresses openness, contingency and incompleteness. Autonomization outlines a model of integration that does not owe its existence to a policy blueprint or an act of political will, nor to the divine providence of the European Commission.

The idea of autonomization causes us to think about EU cohesion policy and the role of the region in new and different ways, or at least to supplement the standard account of the role of the region. This standard account sees the region as the focus for a whole raft of EU policies, ostensibly designed to address the problem of cohesion: the wide disparities in wealth and opportunities that exist between member states and particularly between regions. This has led to the idea that the EU is promoting the interests of sub-national regions over those of the nation-state as a prelude to a federal Europe or a 'Europe of the regions'. For the same reasons the idea of 'multi-level governance'—sub-national, national and supra-national—is now very much part of our thinking about the nature and development of the EU. In contrast, we need to view the regions as key actors in neo-liberal economic policies. Regional growth is a central feature of the neo-liberal policies that predominate in the contemporary EU, both at member state and EU level. However, regional growth of this type is incapable of being generalized (Allen *et al.*, 1998). Regions compete with one another, and growth in one region is frequently at the expense of growth elsewhere. Neo-liberal economic growth encourages autonomized regions. The autonomized region is the EU's accommodation to a combination of globalization and neo-liberalism.

What needs to be emphasized is that the region has assumed a greater and more important role but its prominence is not simply the product of EU policies. The region has been called forth by processes—which come under the general heading of globalization—which are largely beyond the control of EU policy. Of central importance is the tension that exists between the role in which globalization has cast the region, and the region as a central player in the EU's cohesion strategy. It is this topic that forms the central theme of this paper. I wish to review the relationship between the region and EU cohesion policy in the light of the impact of globalization. Rather than simply aligning globalization with integration (and hence by implication as a force for cohesion) we need

to view EU cohesion policy as one outcome of the EU's engagement with the forces of globalization.

What do we mean by cohesion?

Cohesion is a somewhat loosely defined term which embodies the EU's broad aim to be more than a giant market-place. Article 130a of the Treaty on European Union (1992) states that cohesion stands for, 'reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions' (CEC, 1996, p. 13). The term cohesion tends to be employed in such a way as to stand for both the diagnosis and the cure: it is used to refer to both the problem of regional inequality and the policy solutions offered by the EU. Regional convergence with the EU average in terms of GDP per head and unemployment levels tend to be used as indicators of disparity, masking the fact that the EU has no measure of cohesion as such, and no criteria for adjudging whether cohesion is becoming weaker or stronger.⁴ This has led one commentator to conclude that cohesion is best thought of as 'the political tolerability of the levels of economic and social disparity that exist and are expected in the EU' (Mayes, 1995, p. 1).

There are two inescapable features of cohesion in the EU. One, enormous variations exist in levels of economic development, both between member states and between regions within member states (Wishlade, 1996).⁵ Two, these disparities have increased throughout the history of the EU. This situation has not come about because of the failure of EU policy towards the poorer countries and less developed regions as such, but as a consequence of successive enlargements. All previous enlargements of the EU have aggravated the problem of disparities between member states, and in doing so have widened regional disparities in the EU. One likely consequence of the projected enlargement of the EU involving countries from the former communist bloc, is that economic and social disparities between member states will increase. Enlargement will once again undermine cohesion in the EU, particularly as the EU is unlikely to offer new members the same structural benefits currently enjoyed by the EU's poorer member states.

Cohesion is generally understood to be a priority goal of the EU but does not correspond to a set of clearly defined policy objectives. There is no cohesion policy as such (Hooghe, 1998); rather, cohesion policy is an umbrella term for a range of policies that the EU hopes will ameliorate the conditions which are held to be barriers to economic convergence at the national and regional levels: high levels of unemployment, concentrations of wealth in central or favoured nations and sub-national regions, remoteness. The need for cohesion support and the increasing resources committed to the Structural Funds⁶ over the past decade or so has been accounted for in a number of ways. These include the straightforward and simplistic: to facilitate the reduction of economic disparities (Dinan, 1994); the romantic: a mechanism of redistributing wealth from richer to poorer areas (Drake, 1994)—what one might term the 'Robin Hood' view of EU activity; the functional: to facilitate the successful implementation of the Maastricht projects (the single market and EMU), or, to compensate for the tendency of other EU policies to concentrate wealth and exacerbate national and regional economic disparities (Swann, 1995); the political: a 'side deal' to allay the concerns of the poorer member states that greater economic integration would bring disproportionate benefits to the richer member states (Allen, 1996); the atavistic: a concession to interventionism in an EU increasingly dominated by the logic of the market (Amin and Tomaney, 1995).

What is absent from all of these (partial) explanations is the recognition that EU cohesion policy has been shaped by globalization. This has occurred not as a by-product of greater integration but through the animation of the EU region as the site on which the logic of competitiveness and cohesion are inscribed. In order to develop these ideas more fully I will focus on two aspects of the relationship between cohesion and globalization. Firstly, the role of the region in EU cohesion strategy. The coincidence of increasing regional autonomy, emerging forms of economic governance and neo-liberal growth strategies have created the autonomized region, a phenomenon characteristic of the contemporary EU. Secondly, cohesion as a tool of competitiveness. This refers to the way in which cohesion has become detached from a discourse of redistribution and progressively incorporated in a discourse of competitiveness and growth. Cohesion is less about ameliorating backwardness and more to do with underscoring development couched in neo-liberal economic terms.

By concentrating on these aspects I hope to move discussion of cohesion away from an exclusive association with regional problems and Structural Fund support. That cohesion is most commonly associated with Structural Funds rather than strategies for growth and competitiveness, for example, can be accounted for by three interrelated factors. First, a slavish adherence on the part of commentators on EU affairs to an interpretation of cohesion policy which emphasizes only those policies which work directly to further the reduction of disparities, while ignoring those counter-cohesion policies (research and development, the Common Agricultural Policy, for example) which are equally potent. Second, the active encouragement given by the European Commission (particularly under the leadership of Jacques Delors) to an interpretation of cohesion which lays emphasis on its origins in traditions of welfarism and social solidarity. While the contemporary EU embodies the values of the market, the legacy of a more redistributive ethic survives in EU nomenclature. A 'narrative of cohesion' has been constituted which both demarcates the field of study and constructs cohesion as an object of inquiry. It frames the types of questions that can be asked and determines the form that the answers will take. The narrative of cohesion works as a type of intellectual closure, restricting the field of study and pre-empting its findings (Rumford, 2000). Third, globalization is assumed to be responsible for greater European integration and as such has an affinity with cohesion, but its more contradictory influences are less widely understood. There is a reluctance to accept that the region is as much the child of globalization's 'invention of locality' (Robertson, 1995) as it is the progeny of the EU. Likewise, the EU is reluctant to acknowledge that its own policies can be countermanded by forces outside of EU control, and far distant in their origin (Albrow, 1998).

Cohesion and the autonomized region

We have seen how cohesion policy is most commonly associated with the Structural Funds and the reduction of regional disparities. Regional disparities are either the result of extrinsic factors or the unfortunate by-product of EU activity: in either case, a problem to be solved by more effective policy instruments. The argument advanced here is that regional disparities are a structural consequence of EU and national policy preferences. Regional disparities are a corollary of the neo-liberal bias towards the interests of the more advanced regions and sectors (Amin and Tomanev, 1995). Neo-liberal economic policies do not lead to uniform and even economic growth. On the contrary, they encourage growth in one area only at the expense of creating disadvantage in another. In other words, neo-liberal growth helps create the backwardness that cohesion policy tries to alleviate.

Such an account challenges some assumptions about the relationship between the region and cohesion policy. According to an orthodox interpretation, cohesion policy works to ameliorate backwardness and reduce economic disparities between regions. The EU projects the region as the object of policy and allots it a certain degree of coherence. Through its homogenizing use of statistics, the EU assumes a region in which internal differences are of minimal importance. Hence, the problem of cohesion is couched in terms of disparities between regions rather than within them. In contrast, I would draw attention to the differential growth, affluence and internal structure of the region, in which different levels of wealth, unemployment and growth can be discerned and which are of central importance for an understanding of cohesion. This is what Allen *et al.* (1998) have usefully termed the discontinuous region. The discontinuous region is not discrete and cannot easily be bounded, nor is it uniform or homogeneous. In the discontinuous region economic growth is not necessarily uniform. Variegated growth patterns and distribution of wealth are not just experienced between regions, but within them too. A region can contain both pockets of growth and areas of underdevelopment. Regional inequalities are viewed not as an unfortunate product of historical disadvantage or lack of opportunity, but as one outcome of neo-liberal growth. Neo-liberal growth creates pockets of disadvantage as surely as it reinforces economic advantage. Allen *et al.* recast the relationship between the region and the EU. Regional policy is not a mechanism for wealth redistribution; 'its underlying principles are concerned with the removal of obstacles to the free flow of labour and capital as well as goods' (Allen *et al.*, 1998, p. 127). Regional policy should be understood not as a corrective to the single market, but as a mechanism for facilitating its working. In other words, regional inequalities are a barrier to economic integration and their removal, via EU regional policy, contributes to the neo-liberal imperative. On this model, cohesion works for the market.

Placing the region within a matrix of neo-liberalism and globalization provides the basis for a consideration of the region as an economic actor autonomous from national and EU government. No account of EU regional policy and cohesion can avoid the issue of regionalism. But how are we to understand regions as actors in contemporary Europe? Regionalism can be defined as the prioritization of the sub-national region over other units of socio-political organization, such as the nation-state. Regionalism is often thought of as a threat to the nation-state, seeking to fragment it and replace it with a multiplicity of smaller nation-states, for example. Alternatively, regionalism may attempt to weaken the central authority of the nation-state and replace it with a federal arrangement that allows greater regional autonomy. This is the sense in which the association of regionalism and the idea of 'a Europe of the regions' within the EU is generally understood. It is consistent with the view that the EU is somehow promoting the region over the nation-state; the EU is creating a new tier of governance—the region—which, together with the EU itself as a supra-national body, is usurping the role of the nation-state. This is not the way in which regionalism in Europe is best understood. There is a type of regionalism peculiar to the EU. This is not the regionalism of secessionism or cultural autonomy (for example, Basque or Sardinian regionalism), even though these variants are certainly potent in contemporary Europe. The argument here is that regionalism, in the EU context, should be understood in terms of the region as an economic actor within the framework of neo-liberal opportunities and economic governance present within the EU. The emergence of the region as a relatively autonomous economic actor is the result of a specific set of economic and political opportunities that exist within contemporary Europe, but which are not necessarily driven by EU policy. This requires further elaboration.

Globalization consists of a series of processes that destabilize social and economic structures, particularly those pertaining to the nation-state. In this regard, globalization is responsible for the autonomy of localities from their dependence upon a centre. In the EU, globalization is responsible for the reordering of relationships between the region and the nation-state, between the region and the EU, and between the region and other regions. The construction of the modern European region as an economic actor, subject of policy and level of governance is not a matter internal to the EU. The promotion of the region has come as much from above and outside as it has from within (Robertson, 1995). It is not simply that regions are freed from central government constraints: 'the new localities in their globality are as independent of Brussels as they are of Rome or Paris' (Albrow, 1998)

This is way in which the region and regionalism in contemporary Europe is best understood. To avoid confusion and to emphasize the specificity of this phenomenon I will employ the term autonomized regionalism to characterize the ongoing process of regionalism of economic autonomy within the contemporary EU. Autonomized regionalism differs from what for convenience we can call the 'Europe of the regions' version of regionalism (regionalism associated with federalism or greater regional autonomy), in two main ways. First, autonomized regionalism, for the most part, is independent of the influence of EU regional policy, not a component of it. Second, both the rise of autonomized regionalism and the importance of the region as an economic (and ethno-cultural) unit in the contemporary EU is closely linked to the development of the single market. In other words, the rise of regionalism in contemporary Europe can only be properly understood as a corollary of the neo-liberal economic matrix constituted by globalization on the one hand, and the domestic policies of many western European governments since the early and mid-1980s coupled with the EU's Maastricht projects, the single market and Economic and Monetary Union, on the other. It is in this environment of insurgent neo-liberalism that a new relationship between regions, the nation-state and the EU has been forged.

There is a close match between the aspirations of autonomized regions and neo-liberal economic priorities. For both, the welfarist state is a burden and a fetter and constitutes a barrier to economic prosperity. Both neo-liberals and autonomized regions are in favour of reduced central bureaucracy and taxation, less state intervention in the economy, reduced public spending, and cuts to redistributive regional economic development; all areas which traditionally fall under the control of the centralized state. The politics of autonomized regionalism are centred on the conflict between free market and state regulation. The region enters this political arena on the side of the market. Autonomized regionalism is not a movement of the oppressed or marginalized. It is often most developed in what Harvie (1994, p. 2) has termed the 'bourgeois regions', 'areas of sophisticated technology, environmental awareness, local democracy, and a culture and civil society which integrated the intimate and the cosmopolitan'. Harvie's bourgeois regions are motivated more by their affluence (and desire to preserve it) than by any cultural identity. Such regions are also geared up to extracting the maximum benefits that the EU has to offer.

To the autonomized region the importance of the Structural Funds resides not in their potential to increase cohesion or bring about convergence. They fulfil a different role, 'transforming administrative cultures and promoting greater self-reliance in economic development, they are assisting regions to exploit the possibilities that now exist for innovation and flexible specialisation' (Cooke *et al.*, 1997, p. 199). The argument presented here is that the autonomized region is not a creation of EU policy, as such. The autonomized region is a feature of the contemporary EU but has little to do with

EU cohesion objectives. Growth in a region like the UK's south east has, as Allen *et al.* have demonstrated, its roots in an identification with a particular blueprint of success. 'Success in this context meant individual success. It meant depending upon self-reliance, personal ambition, an ethic of hard work and the ability to take advantage of what opportunities came your way in a competitive environment, with little or no concern for the inequities involved' (Allen *et al.*, 1998, p. 9).

There is a strong relation between neo-liberal growth, the individualization of success described above, and the form of governance pursued by the EU. Neo-liberalism has forged new relations 'between the economic health of the nation and the "private" choices of individuals' (Miller and Rose, 1990, p. 329). Entrepreneurial governance has gradually replaced the form of Keynesian welfarist state popular in western Europe from the end of the Second World War until the mid-1970s. Since this time, the idea of the welfarist state as provider of social security, welfare, housing, education and economic initiatives has come increasingly under attack from a neo-liberal critique. The 'government of the social in the name of the national economy gives way to government of particular zones—regions, towns, sectors, communities—in the interests of economic circuits which flow between regions and across national boundaries' (Rose, 1999, p. 339). Autonomization offers a new way for economic actors to conceive of themselves and an alternative route for the realization of economic aims and objectives. This is linked to the idea of the 'entrepreneur of the self' where the individual takes responsibility for 'his/her own self-advancement and care; within the ideals of enterprise, individuals are charged with managing the conduct of the business of their own lives' (du Gay, 1997, p. 302). Rose (1999) maintains that autonomization goes hand-in-hand with the increase of responsibility. Greater autonomy leads to greater freedom of choice and decision making but also entails an increased degree of accountability for the outcome of those choices. The self-regulating, responsible individual cast after the model of the entrepreneur of the self can be easily accommodated into the administration of a whole range of entities; supra-national, national, regional, as well as the firm, the institution, the organization.

Competitiveness and globalization

We must now turn to the second aspect of cohesion: the way in which the relationship between the EU, the region and cohesion has been recast by globalization in terms of market imperatives. Cohesion is to not be understood as the levelling out of disparities through programmes of wealth redistribution. The EU embraces a market economy not a redistributive one. At root, cohesion policy is a series of instruments contributing to the creation of a harmonized European economic space, and enhancing the competitiveness of the EU. Cohesion is increasingly aligned with the EU's drive for competitiveness, and the objective of cohesion is the reduction of economic disparities through the generalized benefits of growth. In other words, cohesion will be brought about via the mechanism of the market, not to compensate for it. The reduction of disparities is held to mean 'convergence of basic incomes through higher GDP growth, of competitiveness and of employment' (CEC, 1996, p. 13). The EU makes this explicit: 'cohesion is concerned with increasing economic growth and new opportunities in the poorer regions and for disadvantaged social groups and does not imply a reduction in either growth or jobs for others' (CEC, 1996, pp. 14–15).

The EU's definition of cohesion is predicated on the need to increase the competitive advantage of regions, rather than to act directly on economic disparities with the aim of reducing them. Cohesion is only nominally about the redistribution of wealth. Cohesion is a pivotal stage in a 'virtuous circuit' of development: cohesion underpins the market,

which leads to greater competitiveness, which leads to growth, which in turn contributes to greater cohesion. This interpretation runs counter to a more orthodox reading of cohesion and its role within the EU. In general terms, this orthodoxy holds that the causes of the problem of cohesion are to be found in historical patterns of development. According to the European Commission such uneven patterns of development have resulted in disparities in the infrastructural and human capital endowments of regions (CEC, 1994, p. 10). It is interesting to note that the disparities are the result of uneven development, not the cause of them. Regional policy is then offered as a way of ameliorating disparities, not, it should be noted, as a way of tackling the causes of uneven development. Hence, the Commission can say that cohesion policy is aimed at reducing the disparities *in competitiveness* between regions (CEC, 1996, p. 70, emphasis added).

The EU has steadily redefined concepts such as harmonization and cohesion away from their redistributive or social market meaning, increasingly aligning them with notions of competitiveness, and stressing their compatibility with neo-liberal growth. In other words, cohesion policy has been rendered compatible both with the EU's wider aims of market development and economic growth and the demands placed on cohesion by the need for competitiveness. The notion of 'harmonious development', inherited from the Treaty of Rome and embedded in the Maastricht Treaty has to be understood in this light. When the EU offers as a definition of cohesion—'harmonious development with a geographical dimension'—it means something quite specific: that development will come about through greater equality of opportunity, not through an evening out of wealth. For example, the European Commission can say that 'The promotion of social cohesion requires the reduction of the disparities which arise from unequal access to employment opportunities' (CEC, 1996, p. 14).

Another good example of the relationship between growth, competitiveness and the objective of cohesion is provided by the EU's publication *Grants and Loans from the European Union* (CEC, 1997). This document also demonstrates the way in which the language of cohesion continues to use the idiom of social solidarity while its substance reveals a very different set of concerns. In this document the European Commission affirms that economic and social cohesion is one of the Union's priority objectives and describes cohesion in terms of 'redistributive policies': cohesion equals solidarity towards its poorest countries and regions. However, included in a list of objectives that are designed to contribute to this solidarity are the following items, all of which suggest that cohesion is increasingly becoming allied to strategies for the harmonization of economic opportunities rather than social solidarity:

- speeding up economic and social development in the less-prosperous countries so that they can play a full part in economic and monetary union and accept the discipline involved;
- redressing present imbalances (for example in wages, social security systems, infrastructure networks, quality or productivity) which can lead to distortions of competition, forced migration, etc.;
- actively promoting growth, competitiveness and employment through infrastructure projects and training.

From this we can see that cohesion is less an objective in its own right and more a tool to further other objectives. Cohesion facilitates EMU by bolstering growth in less-prosperous areas, and offsets the worst shocks that this 'discipline' entails. Cohesion policies are designed to 'redress balances' so as to prevent market distortions and promote growth and employment. Cohesion is an adjunct of competitiveness not redistribution. Accord-

ingly, economic and social disparities will be reduced only through increased productivity. In sum, cohesion is designed to further the goal of competitiveness.

Conclusion: political implications of the autonomized region

The argument presented in this paper is that attempts to bring about greater cohesion are undermined by key processes at work in today's EU. These processes do not, for the most part, originate within the EU, and the EU has only a limited degree of control over them. The nature of globalization, it has been argued, is such that it cannot be reduced to a series of transnational processes: movements of capital, goods and services, and so on, which have stimulated the need for greater EU integration. Globalization has a close relationship with EU integration but has also set in motion a number of other dynamics which act on the EU in contradictory ways, and at many different levels.

Cohesion in the EU cannot be understood simply in terms of EU policies designed to act upon a range of economic disparities. The problem of cohesion has not been caused by the failure of a particular set of policies. Rather, the problem of cohesion is the dynamics of neo-liberal growth itself. The growth of interest in structural and cohesion programmes, and in the levels of funding for these, has coincided with the onset of the Maastricht project of greater economic integration. The emergence of cohesion—both the concept and the problem—is coincident not only with the means to deal with it, but with the rise of the very neo-liberal economic ambitions that created it. Placing cohesion within the frame of globalization makes manifest its many contradictions. Cohesion is not primarily a means of assisting the less developed regions, and the EU's attempts to underpin the single market by preventing existing economic disparities from becoming wider are contradicted by the accommodation of cohesion policies to strategies for growth in an economic environment circumscribed by globalization.

It has also been argued that the region has become the locus of many of the contradictory effects attributable to globalization. The region has emerged as both the site upon which the global acts upon the EU, and the level at which the EU has determined that the processes of globalization can best be accommodated. In the terms referred to earlier in the paper, globalization has generated autonomization, and the region has been produced at the intersection of a multiplicity of processes. Neo-liberal growth policy and the search for greater EU competitiveness, taken in conjunction with globalization, have led to the creation of the autonomized region, a combination which has worked to compromise the EU's attempts to bring about greater cohesion. Under the sign of autonomization the region loses its homogeneity and coherence. The region becomes internally differentiated and exhibits discordant and non-generalizable growth.

Under such circumstances what potential exists for the region to become a leading player in the transformation of Europe? What is the political potential of the region? Further questions suggest themselves. Do autonomized regions possess a significant degree of control over their destinies? Can the autonomized region become a force for democracy? We can begin to address these questions by acknowledging that the major transformations of our time—the collapse of communism, globalization, and European integration—have brought about fundamental shifts in the political field. The traditional reference points for democratic politics in Europe—communism as the Other of democracy, and the dominance of political identifications deriving from the class divisions within national societies—have been displaced. Similarly, the nation-state's claim on the loyalty of its citizens has been called into question by a fracturing of the 'natural' bond between nation and state and by the emergence of competing forms of identification (ethnicity, religion, sub-national regionalism, for example). Certain ideas

associated with modernity, for example that the nation-state provides the dominant frame of meaning to our lives (Albrow, 1996, p. 106), or that the state, society and the individual must exist in a purposeful bond (Albrow, 1996, p. 77), no longer have the salience that they once did.

New relationships between the individual, society, and the state have been occasioned by the processes of globalization and European integration. Such change involves much more than the existence of new levels of state power. It is no longer possible to talk of the state—either the nation-state or its sub- or supra-national variants—as the primary loci of political power. We must examine the state within the wider field of forms of government. It has been argued that in contemporary Europe the state is better thought of as but one element in a de-centred array of sources of power and authority. To study the political role of the region in the EU we must examine the type of government consistent with the ways in which the EU seeks to regulate a harmonized European economic space, through the responsabilization and self-regulation of a whole range of actors, including regions. Contemporary European politics cannot be characterized simply in terms of struggles directed at capturing state power at the supra-, national, or sub-national level, and by deepening democracy or expanding ‘civil society’. We have moved on to a new political terrain. The object of politics is no longer what it was under conditions of modernity. Collective political action is increasingly an ethical politics centred on the expression of self-identity. We can say that the politics of emancipation has given way to a post-materialist politics of identity assertion. It follows that political and social transformation does not necessarily proceed according to previously accepted norms.

How is the autonomized region to be understood within this political schema? The autonomized region exists within a framework of opportunities erected upon a terrain dominated by neo-liberalism, the drive for competitiveness, and the logic of the market. On this basis regions can be winners or losers in the ‘new Europe’ but, as we have seen, individuation of success is no model for generalizable growth. Nor can the region be understood as a building block for greater European integration or a tool through which to achieve greater cohesion. For autonomized regions European integration exists as a resource from which they can empower themselves. On the whole, the autonomized region—at least the ‘winners’ from amongst their number (Harvie’s ‘bourgeois regions’, for example)—demonstrate a form of politics which is more in line with the post-materialist assertion of an identity than emancipation or democratization, as traditionally understood. However, there is some potential for a more ‘progressive’ political orientation and I will conclude by outlining very briefly how the ‘reordered hierarchies of economy and space’ engendered by globalization can be a force for democratic change in the EU.

The EU works with a model of growth which assumes a core–periphery relationship between the EU’s member states and regions. It is a model of dependency: growth is generated in core areas and the benefits of this growth are then disseminated to the peripheries. The Structural Funds owe their existence in no small part to the idea that the single market would exacerbate existing core periphery disparities. Similarly, the philosophy underlying the trans-European networks is that they provide a means whereby the dissemination of benefits accruing in the core of the EU can be more easily spread to the periphery. The dominant appreciation of EU disparities is based on this core–periphery model, and, I would argue, it is both distorting and debilitating, inhibiting consideration of other patterns of disadvantage and exclusion. An approach to EU integration centred on a nuanced understanding of globalization, and which acknowledges the importance of the discontinuous and autonomized region, permits a

different view of the peripheries. In the autonomized, globalized EU the local does not draw its legitimacy from its position in relation to the centre. The EU is best thought of as having a multiplicity of 'centres' whose relations with localities are infinitely various (Albrow, 1998, p. 8). That the EU has determined that the region is the level at which globalization can best be accommodated is of particular significance for Europe's peripheral regions. Globalization has (differentially, to be sure) empowered regions in a way which confounds core-periphery expectations. One of the consequences of this is that many of the assumptions upon which EU regional policy has been constructed are increasingly challenged and politicized. The use of Structural Funds to bring about growth in core areas as a way of providing 'trickle-down' assistance to peripheries would be one example of such an assumption. Using GDP per head and levels of unemployment as *the* measures of disparities, and the way the use of these indicators work to homogenize the region, would be another example. The way in which indicators of social exclusion are predicated on the norms associated with core areas, would be yet another. The politicization of these and other issues, often misinterpreted as a policy debate between the Cohesion countries and the rest about the re(-) distribution of scarce EU resources, supports the confident assertion that 'Europe at the turn of the millennium is constantly surprised by its periphery' (Leontidou and Afouxenidis, 1999), and suggests that the autonomized region and the peripheries refuse to conform to patterns of behaviour dictated by core-periphery assumptions.

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Notes

1. Ross (1998) is of the opinion that European integration has had the effect of promoting globalization, rather than being conditioned by it.
2. The authors make the point that globalization is a more 'complete and penetrating' stage of internationalization. The idea that both integration and globalization are stages of the same process serves only to underline their commonality.

3. The term autonomization is derived from the work of the governmentality theorists, sometimes referred to as the Anglo-Foucauldians. See the work of Rose (1999) and Dean (1999) for representative examples of their work. Governmentality is potentially of great relevance for a study of the EU because it causes us to rethink the relationship between state and government. Governmentality draws attention to the ways in which government increasingly works by means of empowering the autonomous individual, who then becomes responsible for monitoring and regulating his/her own conduct. Rather than simply by means of the state 'government is accomplished through multiple actors and agencies rather than a centralised set of state apparatuses' (Dean, 1999, p. 26).
4. It is worth noting that the incidence of poverty is not used as an index of cohesion. This is because there is no consistent EU-wide measure of poverty. Poverty in a given country is defined as the proportion of households with an income that is 50% or less than the average for that country.
5. Variations are quite pronounced. Judged by Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) the poorest region is Ipeiros in Greece, with a GDP per person which stands at 43% of the EU15 average. The richest is Inner London, at 222%. There are 50 regions below 75% of the EU15 average, while at the other end of the scale 10 regions have a GDP per person around 1.5 times the EU15 average. In nine member states GDP per person in the richest region is approximately double the lowest. Regional differences in Germany and the UK are much more pronounced. In the UK, there are regions with a third of Inner London's 222%. There is an even greater disparity between Hamburg and some of the former GDR regions of Germany (CEC, 1999a).
6. The Structural Funds comprise the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF), and the Fisheries Guidance Instrument (FGI). The total Structural Fund budget for the period 1994–99 amounted to ECU154.5 billion (at 1994 prices). This approximates to one-third of the total EU budget.