

**KANT'S PERPETUAL  
PEACE PROJECT  
AND THE PROJECT  
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION<sup>1</sup>**

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*The article examines the following problems: 1) How well-founded is the comparison of the ideas of Kant's essay «Towards Perpetual Peace», written in late XVIII century, with the implementation of nowadays project of European Union 2) If such parallels are possible, to what extent the structure of the EU corresponds to Kant's vision? 3) Which Kantian ideas are of the foremost importance to future development of the EU?*

*Basing on the analysis of Kant's treatise and of the current structure of the EU, the author arrives to the conclusion that the two projects can suitably be compared. However, such comparison requires viewing the EU as an intermediate stage in the establishment of global peace union. The comparative analysis of Kant's theory and the European project, the EU in its current form suits Kant's definition of a federation of sovereign states, united for the purpose of securing peace, and in some respects went even further. The process of European integration has transformed Europe's regional buildup from the arena of regular war conflicts into the society of peace, prosperity, liberty and right. It is obvious that in its development the EU will undergo difficulties and crises. However, the general direction, chosen by the union of European states, aiming at the development of rights and liberties, at good-will and cooperation between individuals, societies and states perfectly corresponds to the spirit of Kant's philosophy and should guarantee of success in establishing global peace in the future.*

**Key words:** *European Union, perpetual peace project, peaceful union of peoples, world federation, federalism, republicanism.*

When the essay *Toward Perpetual Peace* was first published in 1795, it was welcomed enthusiastically, which is often the fate of beautiful and logic, yet utopian ideas. It was hard to believe at the time that two centuries later not only would Kant's project not sink into oblivion, but, to the contrary, it would become the focus of close attention. Today, despite the age of the essay in question, the reader of *Toward Perpetual Peace* may have an impression that Kant's genius anticipated development of multiple modern political processes and phenomena in the world, the most remarkable of which is foundation and evolution of the European Union.

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Economic, political and military integration processes taking place in Europe in the framework of both the European Union and its predecessors – the ECSC (European Coal and Steel Community) and the EEC (European Economic Community) – led to creation of a community of countries, which is unique for our time and now serves as a model and an example of regional integration and cooperation for other countries of the world. Immanuel Kant is often considered the ideological father of the European Union. Some even go so far as to say that the modern-day European Union was founded and is now following the principles of the Kantian philosophy. Is it true? In this article, I undertake to answer each of the following questions: 1) Is it really possible to compare the ideas of Kant's essay *Toward Perpetual Peace*, written at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the innovative and ambitious project of the European union, started in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and ongoing in the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? 2) If such a comparison is possible, to what extent does the structure of the EU correspond to Kant's vision? 3) Which Kantian ideas are of the utmost importance for future development of the EU?

Let us start from the beginning. Two diametrically opposed viewpoints exist in the debate regarding possibility of parallels between Kant's perpetual peace and the EU project. What arguments do the opponents of such parallelism present? Firstly, Kant's project is just an ideal, a logical, but still theoretical, practically unrealizable construct, that is why its comparison with the political institution existing in the reality – the modern-day EU – is not well-founded (Höffe, 2007, S. 13). Thus, the Czech philosopher Pavel Kouba negates the possibility of "a perpetual peace", believing it to be unreachable as a matter of principle, because "a peace that the politics must take serious care of is finite and thus can never be perpetual" (Kouba, 2000, S. 128). Secondly, historical context in which Kant's essay was conceived and modern political reality in Europe are fundamentally different. That is why Kant's construct does not comply with the actual state of affairs. Among others, Jürgen Habermas believes that Kant's construct "does not comply with our historical experience any more" (Habermas, 1996, S. 7). Thirdly, the opponents of parallelism between Kant's peaceful union and the EU advance another argument according to which Kant devised his peace program on a planetary scale and it should not be considered a manual on how to achieve peace in any given country. Therefore, there is no reason to compare Kant's project for a perpetual peace with the EU project. Ottfried Höffe shares this opinion and maintains that Kant's program describes a peaceful union on a planetary scale, not limited to a single region (Höffe, 1995, S. 245).

Are the aforementioned arguments offered by the opponents of parallelism between the perpetual peace project and the EU project fair? They are rather not. Firstly, considering feasibility of the Kantian program, even if 200 years ago the idea of a world federation seemed utopian, today, taking into account existence of such an institution as the UN, it does not seem unrealizable, at least as a matter of principle. It is, however, evident that the UN and other global international institutions are quite ineffective and come nowhere near a planetary union of nations. Still, if such institutions are to be considered an intermediate phase for construction of a global peaceful union, then Kant's peaceful project is, at the very least, worth a careful study. Secondly, speaking of compliance or non-compliance of the Kantian program with current realities, we have to admit that Kant's political views were influenced by enlightened absolutism and the French revolution. Notwithstanding, Kant succeeded to "transcend" his analysis from the

historical context of late 18<sup>th</sup> century and devised general theoretical principles and conditions required to reach a stable planetary peace (Höntzsch, 2007, S. 15). He deduced these principles not from historical reality of his age, but rather from principles of Reason, unrelated to a given historical period or place. It is possible to agree with the third argument expressed above, but only in part. For Kant one of the conditions necessary to reach a stable and firm perpetual peace is its universal nature. Otherwise, there would always be a possibility of external threat, compelling nations to maintain standing armies and defense spending, thus contradicting the third Preliminary Article of the peace program proposed in Kant's essay: "Standing Armies (miles perpetuus) shall in time be totally abolished" (ZeF, AA VIII, S. 345). Nevertheless, Kant was perfectly conscious of the fact – the text of the essay itself proves it- that no world federation could appear at once: "The practicability (objective reality) of this idea of a federalism that should gradually extend over all states and so lead to perpetual peace can be shown" (ZeF, AA VIII, S. 356). A focal point for unification is needed at the very beginning:

For if good fortune should ordain that a powerful and enlightened people can form itself into a republic (which by its nature must be inclined to perpetual peace), this would provide a focal point of federative union for other states, to attach themselves to it and so to secure a condition of freedom of states conformably with the idea of the right of nations; and by further alliances of this kind, it would gradually extend further and further... (ZeF, AA VIII, S. 356).

As the previous quotation shows, Kant understood very well that the "perpetual peace" on the planet is the humanity's ultimate political goal, which may only be reached through many intermediate phases. One of such phases would be local or regional federative unions, such as the EU, which would eventually form one global world federation.

As it can be seen from our analysis, reasons for comparison and parallelism between Kant's project and the EU project are numerous, provided only that in this case the EU must be considered an intermediate phase on the way to a global world federation. This is an important assumption enabling further comparison. If it is not accepted, it may result in the theoretical objections mentioned above.

What do Kant's program and the EU project have in common? In order to answer this question, we have to recall the definitive conditions for a stable peace mentioned in the essay. These conditions are represented by the definitive articles for perpetual peace:

- *the civil constitution in every state shall be republican* (ZeF, AA VIII, S. 349);
- *the right of nations shall be based on a federalism of free states* (ZeF, AA VIII, S. 354).

Let us consider the first Kantian condition concerning republican civil constitution. The European Union meets this requirement: although not all member states of the EU have republican constitutions, their political organizations are still republican. Some countries (Denmark, Netherlands, Great Britain, Sweden, Spain, Belgium, and Luxembourg) are monarchies, at least formally. However, it does not contradict Kant's ideas, because Kant distinguished between the form of sovereignty (democracy, autocracy/monarchy, aristocracy) and the form of government (republican and despotic) (ZeF, AA VIII, S. 352). Hence, a state may have a monarchical form of sovereignty and a republican form of government. Even if all European monarchies of the EU have a monarch as a formal head of

state, their forms of government are republican, defined by Kant as “a constitution established, first on principles of the freedom of the members of a society (as individuals), second on principles of the dependence of all upon a single common legislation (as subjects), and third on the law of their equality (as citizens of a state)...” (ZeF, AA VIII, S. 349f.). Thus, unlike absolute monarchies at the time of Kant, all modern-day European monarchies – member states of the European Union – are constitutional. The difference between current constitutional monarchies and absolute monarchies resides in the fact that in a parliamentary monarchy the monarch is restricted in their governing powers, including legislative and executive ones, both *de jure* and *de facto*. The legislative power belongs to the parliament, while the executive one belongs to the government responsible for its activities to the parliament. That is why in reality constitutional monarchies, in spite of formally remaining “monarchies”, are rather republics according to the form of government, because they are governed based on the republican principle construed by Kant as “the political principle of separation of the executive power (the government) from the legislative power” (ZeF, AA VIII, p. 352).

Let us now consider the second Kantian condition concerning establishment of a world federation, in compliance with which independent states should voluntarily form a federal structure. It seems that the EU is quite in line with this Kantian condition: the EU is an international structure with member states forming a voluntary union. At the same time, strictly speaking, the EU is not a federation. Many scholars point out “a typically federal nature” of the EU, but at the same time they prefer to call the EU not a federation in the proper sense of the word, but “a prefederal structure”, “a largely federal organization”, “an incomplete federal state” (Cappeletti, 1986, p. 91–92) etc. In other words, even if now the European Union’s legal and political structure cannot be described as federal in the literal sense, it contains some elements of a federation and has a tendency to eventually become one (Burgess, 2000, p. 25–25). It is also worth mentioning that the European project – from its very beginning up until now – is undergoing a permanent process of transformation and development, which will apparently continue for years to come. Founded as an international organization in 1952 (the European Coal and Steel Community), this union of Western European countries was transformed in 1957 into the European Economic Community, i.e. a union already at the regional level, and, finally, into the European Union in 1993 (which is much closer to a federation, than to an international organization). What is remarkable in the history of the European Union, is that the role of commerce, which, according to Kant, was to become one of the factors, solidifying the peaceful union, has been fully justified:

It is the spirit of commerce, which cannot coexist with war and which sooner or later takes hold of every nation. In other words, since the power of money may well be the most reliable of all the powers (means) subordinate to that of a state, states find themselves compelled (admittedly not through incentives of morality) to promote honorable peace and, whenever war threatens to break out anywhere in the world, to prevent it by mediation, just as if they were in a permanent league for this purpose (ZeF, AA VIII, S. 368).

In other words, the actual EU complies in many ways with the Kantian conditions for a peaceful union of nations. Moreover, if we consider the ideas regar-

ding possibilities to reach a lasting peace, which dominate the field of peace studies since the 1970s, we can see that scholars distinguish three phases on the way from war to a stable peace: 1) negative peace; 2) positive peace; 3) integration (Seidelmann, 1998, S. 140–141). Negative peace means absence of war here and now – that is what Kant called a truce. Positive peace is, probably, the peace that the German philosopher called stable, the one humanity should aspire to. Integration – one of the main goals of the EU – means a fusion of the states so complete as to eliminate any possibility of war between them. In this respect, the EU project leaves behind the project of Kant, who did not believe that such a close integration of states would be possible in reality. Thus, if in the future the EU transforms into a single federal state, it would be beyond the scope of Kant's peaceful union, because it would result in reduction or destruction of sovereignties of the EU member states and lead to their interdependence, which is what Kant wanted to avoid in his "peaceful union" (Gerhardt, 1995, S. 95). Kant was against a world republic and fusion of all nations into a single world nation:

This would be a league of nations, which, however, need not be a state of nations. That would be a contradiction, inasmuch as every state involves the relation of a superior (legislating) to an inferior (obeying, namely the people); but a number of nations within one state would constitute only one nation, and this contradicts the presupposition (since here we have to consider the right of nations in relation to one another insofar as they comprise different states and are not to be fused into a single state) (ZeF, AA VIII, S. 354).

Hence, for Kant a federation is a peaceful league (*foedus pacificum*), not more (Gerhardt, 1995, S. 95). Kant believed that this kind of cooperation would eliminate, on the one hand, any military threat, while, on the other hand, permitting to preserve sovereignty. Kant's view on this issue is subject to criticism, among others, from German scholar of international relations Reimund Seidelmann, who believes that the Kantian "peaceful union" has neither required common will, nor military assets necessary to efficiently repel by force a strong aggressor (Seidelmann, 1998, S. 173).

The events of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century demonstrated that such organizations (for instance, the League of Nations, which formally complied with Kant's definition of a "peaceful union") are not capable to resist a strong external aggressor or a union of aggressors in an efficient manner, nor can they have sufficient influence on their own member states. Partially, these shortcomings are preserved in the actual structure of the UN, which is in many ways a global international organization with the principal goal to secure peace on our planet (i.e. the UN is, essentially, a Kantian *foedus pacificum*), but in reality the UN does not have enough influence to reach this goal. In other words, historical experience gives us every reason to assert that not only can we hope to reach (a relatively stable) peace through foundation of a negative surrogate of a union of nations, but also to reduce or to eliminate almost completely military threat through integration of member states of a federation. However, as shows the evolution of the EU, transfer of some part of sovereignty to the common federal government (for instance, foreign policy and security, defense, commerce and transport) does not lead to disappearance of a nation or a state, it only makes war almost impossible between such states due to their multi-level cooperation; especially taking into account existence of numerous legal mechanisms of con-

flict resolution. The latter corresponds to Kant's desire expressed in his words about the necessity for the nations to be under civil laws. The philosopher's call for a juridification (*Verrechtlichung*) of -at least- international relations is a necessary, but insufficient condition for reaching peace and improving cooperation between nations. This call was well understood by the architects behind European integration, who considered that obeying the law consistently was one of the conditions to equalize differences in governance and in interests within a new supranational community and, thus, to create the necessary legal basis for a closer interaction between member states of the EU. That is why, despite Kant's opinion, existence of supranational structures limiting sovereignty of some states within a federal union, such as the European Court, is indispensable. The crucial role of political correlation between integration process and the law making process is clearly demonstrated by the debate on the EU Constitution: a new supranational identity should receive a legal interpretation as a result of the work on this document, which will not only accelerate integration, but also – and first of all – further democratization of the supranational EU.

Having dealt with the first two questions, I have only to answer the third one, namely: Can Kant's bicentennial project be of any help for further development of the EU project? As I stressed above, it is necessary to distinguish theoretical and historical and practical aspects of the essay of Kant. Of course, Kant's practical recommendations based on realities of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century can hardly help the project, which will be further implemented in the 21<sup>st</sup> century or, perhaps, even later. On the other hand, Kant's theoretical conclusions may be taken into account.

For instance, Kant mentions gradual expansion of the league of nations until it includes all the nations of the Earth. In the context of the EU project, it may be interpreted in such a way that the EU should not be limited by European boundaries. Provided that the principles of the EU are observed, the right to join the Union should be granted to all applicants, regardless of their geographic positions, subject to the condition that new members will declare themselves ready to follow the principles of the EU. It is also necessary to establish closer ties and cooperation with other regional associations, such as ASEAN<sup>2</sup>. Gradual integration with such associations may lead to the establishment of a supraregional federation in the future.

Kant's call for juridification, i.e. further development of civil, international and cosmopolitan right, will also remain important in the future. The European Union is on this way now already and the ongoing integration process has among its goals the implementation of Kant's most important idea – the idea that all human relations should come within the compass of law. In this respect, according to German scholar Frauke Höntzsch, the EU is on the *way* Toward Perpetual Peace, in the proper sense of the word, and it is approaching Kant's ideal in some legal aspects, even if to varying extents (Höntzsch, 2007, S. 110). It may be seen especially well in case of the constitutional law owing to development of representative democracy in EU member states. In the field of international law the EU development follows in many aspects the guidelines of Kantian federalism, but, according to Kant's idea, the EU must not fall prey to excessive

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<sup>2</sup> The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is a political and economic organization of ten Southeast Asian countries.

centralization and turn into a giant state, where the rights of its member states could be violated. Regarding development of a cosmopolitan right within the scope of the European project, it is worth noting that there already exists citizenship of the European Union, which in Kant's terms could be called a negative surrogate of cosmopolitan right. Kant considered the latter – one of the necessary supplementary conditions for perpetual peace:

...the idea of a cosmopolitan right is no fantastic and exaggerated way of representing right; it is, instead, a supplement to the unwritten code of the right of a state and the right of nations necessary for the sake of any public rights of human beings and so for perpetual peace... (ZeF, AA VIII, S. 360).

An important aspect of implementation of the cosmopolitan right (even in its limited regional application) is the right of European citizens to travel visa-free to any member state of the EU (which also represents a kind of negative surrogate of the Kantian right to visit other countries). It is quite evident that positive results already reached by the European Union can and must be pursued in the spirit of the Kantian right of a person to visit other countries, which should lead in the future not only to elimination of administrative barriers to free movement from one country to another (for instance, abolition of the visa regime between Russia and the EU), but also to contribute to the achievement of a stable peace on the Earth: "In this way distant parts of the world can enter peaceably into relations with one another, which can eventually become publicly lawful and so finally bring the human race ever closer to a cosmopolitan constitution" (ZeF, AA VIII, S. 358).

Summing up our small comparative research on the Kantian project for a perpetual peace and the European project being implemented at the present time, it is worth mentioning that the modern-day European Union fits quite well within the scope of Kant's federation of sovereign states united to establish peace, whereas to some extent the EU has advanced even further than Kant's peaceful union. The process of European integration has transformed Europe's regional order from the arena of constant armed conflicts into the society of peace, prosperity, liberty and right. It is obvious that the EU is unlikely to avoid difficulties and crises in its future development. However, the general direction chosen by the community of European states, aimed at developing human rights and liberties, goodwill and cooperation between people and countries, perfectly corresponds to the spirit of Kantianism and should serve as a guarantee for a perpetual planetary peace in the future.

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