
Shrinking European Union : A joint analysis of demographic and economic trends (1960-2030)

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Abstract

One of the most commented - and discussed - figure realized in the ESPON project Europe in the World (Grasland & Beckouche, 2007) and further published in the Atlas de l'Europe dans le Monde (Didelon & al., 2008) was the evaluation of the share of European Union in the world in terms of population and GDP. The aim of the presentation is to propose an update of these document based on a critical discussion of the initial hypothesis.

1. The hypothesis of an invisible geopolitical agenda of EU

The figure produced in 2007 apparently demonstrated that, despite a continuous tendency of decline of population and GDP in European countries since the 1960's, the share of the EU had remained constant between 1960 and 2006 around 7% of world population and 20% of world economy, thanks to the continuous process of enlargement from 6 to 9, 10, 12, 15, 25, 27 ... The comments of the figure did argue that the stability of the share of EU in the World was the result of a kind of "invisible geopolitical agenda". The member states of EU was not necessary aware of this agenda. But as the matter of fact, they had behave as if it was the case, in order to maintain a constant level of influence in the World.

Even if the hypothesis of invisble agenda was not necessarily accepted, many policymakers was interested by the evidence that was revealed by the figure. It was also used as an ideological argument in favor of the justification of enlargement and interest of cooperation inside EU. In the context of 2007-2008, the optimism in favour of the EU project was relatively high and nobody was surprised by the fact that the figure introduced an assumption of enlargement of EU to Turkey between 2020 and 2030, in order to maintain the 7/20 objective.

2. Critical discussion of the document produced in 2007

Ten years after the publication, it is fair to admit that the document produced in the framework of ESPON suffered from some important weaknesses from statistical but also conceptual points of view.

From statistical point of view, the collection of data of population was relatively simple and objective. But the data about economy was more subject to debate. We had indeed use the historical database from Angus Maddison (2007) that propose a very long term historical estimation of GDP in parity purchase power (PPP). We did not discussed many important issues concerning these database: the choice of a measure in PPP, the method of

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estimation of GDP of socialist countries during the Cold War period, the level of uncertainty of the measure in the past, the method of extrapolation used for the period 2005-2020 ...

From conceptual point of view, the focus on only two dimensions (economic and demographic) was also a point of debate. We could have considered other indicators of world power available in long term time series like the Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) proposed by political scientists for the project Correlates of War (Singer, 1988). We could also have discussed the question of aggregation of countries of EU in a single unit. In classical analysis of world power, the units of observation are single states and it is not obvious that the power of a group of states is equal to the sum of their power (Taylor & Kearns, 1993).

3. An attempt of update of the evolution of the size of EU in the world (1960-2030)

In these final section we propose an update of the figure produced in 2007 based on the collection of recent data of demographic and economic size and a short exercise of prospective taking into account the changing geopolitical landscape. The Brexit is of course a major element of modification of the size of EU in the world, as well as the currently low probability of enlargement to Turkey in a near future. The effects of the world crisis of 2008-2013 has also modified the expectations made 10 years ago.

The results will certainly confirm the evidence of a economic influence of EU in the world, whatever the criteria of estimation of GDP measured in \$ or PPP (see. <https://fullfact.org/europe/eu-has-shrunk-percentage-world-economy/>). But it is interesting to evaluate more precisely the geographical distribution of this decline by EU countries. And to examine why and how the theory of the invisible agenda of EU has failed.

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Keywords: European Union, Demography, Economy, Shrinking, Geopolitics