**John Torpey** 00:00

Hi, my name is John Torpey, and I'm Director of the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Welcome to International Horizons, a podcast of the Ralph Bunche Institute that brings scholarly expertise to bear on timely international issues.

**John Torpey** 00:18

Today's topic is how the pandemic is changing the nature of the European Union. And we're fortunate to have with us today Teresa Pullano, who is an Assistant Professor at the Institute for European Global Studies at the University of Basel in Switzerland. She got her PhD in political theory from the Institute for Political Studies, otherwise known as Science Po, in Paris, and has served as a visiting researcher at the Università degli Studi di Roma Tre, at Columbia University and at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. Her research focuses on interpretations of the European Union as a process of statehood and territorial restructuring at the continental level. Thank you so much for joining us today, Teresa Pullano.

**Teresa Pullano** 01:12

Thank you very much, too, John. And please forgive my sore throat today.

**John Torpey** 01:18

Sure. Thank you for doing this.

**Teresa Pullano** 01:22

Thank you also to Merrill and to Hristo.

**John Torpey** 01:26

Yes, yes, thank you. Okay. So the essential nature of the European Union has been debated since its creation, is that the United States of Europe? Is it just a customs union? Should it be characterized by what one analyst called pooled sovereignty? Can you explain to us your understanding of the character of the European states under the treaties and laws of the European Union? And how it may have changed over time?

**Teresa Pullano** 01:57

Yes. Thank you very much, John, for this question. This is at the heart of my work. I will start with a difficult answer and then try to explain it. For me, the European Union has to be understood as a process of qualitative transformation of statehood. And this starts from an evolution transformation of what statehood is for the member states. And then it has its effects; the reorganization of statehood at the continental level. So I don't see it as the European Union imposing a change of a member state, but rather as a substantial process. Starting and involving the state resulting in the European Union. And this might sound a little bit counterintuitive, because legally speaking, the European Union is an intergovernmental organization, it has a legal persona, but it is not a state. So I have to explain a little bit my take and explain why I feel it is important.

**Teresa Pullano** 03:12

I think that the historical question here is central, because what I feel is that since the start of the Coal and Steel Community until the evolution with it with the European Union, what we see is a continuous gap between the material constitution of the European Union evolving in, for example, the extension of certain rights that were allowed or that were a prerogative of member states; rights to reside, right to vote in local elections, right to conduct business in another member states. The constant and gradual extension of these rights has created for me a material for all of continental statehood.

**Teresa Pullano** 04:16

In my material, I mean a form of statehood that has evolved through practices; practices of freedom of movement, practices of activities of citizens in other member states, practices of exchange, practices of constitution of the internal market, etc. But practices as always, have also been followed by, or fostered, or better fostered by legal evolutions. So for me what is really central is that the material constitution of European statehood translates into a whole set of EU regulations and directives that give a very strong impulsion to this form of statehood. And therefore, the question of law, and how do we have to understand the role of law is core. And for me, law has a performative power. It's institution setting law, EU law, is the forum through which the European Union as a political institution that I name as a form of statehood, is created.

**Teresa Pullano** 05:36

Of course, if we look at the treaties, I think that we can see this aspect nested in the ambiguities and the contradictions of the treaties. I will make just one example; if you take the treaty on the European Union, first, you have the names of old member states, and you have, for example, it starts with "His Majesty, The King of the Belgians, Her Majesty, The Queen of Denmark, and so on, so forth, resolve blah, blah, blah... And especially, has resolved to take a new stage in the process of creating an ever closer union, amongst the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen." For me, here, it is central to see the ambiguity between the fact that the foundation of the sovereign power resides within member states. At least formally speaking. And this makes it also possible for them to withdraw like we have seen in the case of the United Kingdom.

**Teresa Pullano** 06:52

But at the same time, what does it mean that these states decide to coordinate? And to enhance a process of creating an ever closer union? How do these two things come together? And, on top of that, who is the citizen the treaty speaks about? So the treaty says decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen, who are these various citizens, they don't say it, they don't repeat; "With respect to the nationals of Belgium, Denmark, blah, blah, blah, and all the member states." And this has been a large part of my work trying to understand who is this European citizen always struggling between EU citizenship as a fundamental right, and as an autonomous status with respect to member states, nationalities. But at the same time, depending upon the posession of member states and nationalities. So in my opinion, it is precisely through these contradictions and through the workings of the law, that navigate with, for example, older judgments of the Luxembourg court, that this form of statehood, and a form of territory at the continental level takes place.

**Teresa Pullano** 08:29

And I would just like to end this point by making an example. I think that the Brexit case illustrates this very well, because, of course, since January 31st of 2020, the United Kingdom is not any more a member of the European Union. Still, we are seeing all the difficulties of negotiating an agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union. No one knows which conditions how it will be done in a month. And everyone is afraid of not having a deal. And I think this shows precisely all the material, political and economic interconnections between former member states like the UK, and the European Union

**Teresa Pullano** 09:23

This is very helpful. But I guess I wonder for American listeners, whether you could briefly compare the European Union to the United States. I mean, how is it similar and how is it different? Is the European Union a United States of Europe, or is it really something else?

**Teresa Pullano** 09:44

I think it's really something else because I think, and I ask you, John, that a state of the United States could not withdraw like this, like the UK did. I cannot imagine, especially in the current situation, let's say Pennsylvania, says: "Oh, well, we are withdrawing from the United States." And anyway the United States is recognized as a state. I think that what is interesting in the case of the European Union, it's really to see that it's going towards a different form of statehood.

**Teresa Pullano** 10:31

I think, for me, the United States, I don't know, I'm not an expert of the United States, but I would compare it more to classical federal states, where as I think that the European Union poses the question of forms of statehood, and sovereignty, that go beyond the classical Weberian model of statehood. But I don't know, what do you think?

**Teresa Pullano** 10:58

Well, I think that's just right. Obviously, the last time that the states tried to secede from the United States it created a civil war. I think it's notable that it's referred to as a civil war, rather than a war of independence, which is what created the United States in the first place. So, as you say, nobody was really expecting it in Europe. It was kind of assumed that people would not go anywhere, and that what happened in the British situation was possible in theory, but not something anybody really contemplated.

**Teresa Pullano** 11:41

Exactly. Yup.

**John Torpey** 11:42

Which is why it's been so troublesome. I mean, among other reasons why it's been troublesome. That's one of them.

**John Torpey** 11:50

But in any case I just think that for Americans, it's hard to figure out what this European Union thing is. I think Henry Kissinger once famously said "if I want to call Europe who do I call?" And of course, the answer was, well, there was nobody to call. And this continues as an issue in Europe, with regard to the so called Common Security and Defence policy.

**John Torpey** 12:15

I mean, what kind of military might could Europe as a coherent entity actually put out on the field, so to speak, and I think there are a lot of doubts about that. One of the things that Trump complained about was that the Europeans weren't carrying their weight, But he was not the first to complain about that. I think the United States was always a little ambivalent; on the one hand, they wanted Europeans to be more militarily capable, on the other hand, they didn't want to necessarily strong enough to go its own way. Now, under the Trump presidency, I think, as we've heard from people like Angela Merkel, the perception is that they can now no longer rely on the United States as a partner. And that has pushed them in the direction of really going their own way in a kind of way that was unprecedented in the Post War period.

**Teresa Pullano** 12:15

Of course.

**Teresa Pullano** 13:08

Yeah, I agree with you on this point. I say that the Trump presidency and the military question, the security question, and therefore the relationship with the US has been definitely key to recent changes in EU orientation, as well as the Brexit. I think we can read these two phenomena together.

**John Torpey** 13:28

Right. And of course, there's a big question now that we presume Joe Biden is going to take over the Office of President from Mr. Trump. And, is it possible to reconstruct these post war alliances that sort of undergirded the whole Cold War period and the period since the collapse of the Soviet Union? Or is that world now sort of irremediably gone and we have to kind of come up with a new set of security and foreign policy arrangements? What will happen to the transatlantic Alliance? etc, etc. So these are all big questions for the for the future.

**John Torpey** 14:07

But I want to get back to something you mentioned in your answer to my question that had to do with freedom of movement. Obviously, the freedom of movement has been seen as in many ways, the sine qua non, perhaps, of European citizenship. That is that people who are citizens of these member states have the right to move around and without real restriction. Of course, that has changed recently as a result of the pandemic, but I think the question is, to what extent has this ability to move around actually been taken advantage of by the citizens of the various member states? And to what extent has there developed a kind of European consciousness as opposed to the consciousness of being a citizen X country, say Germany, France or Italy?

**Teresa Pullano** 15:05

Yeah. Well, I think that these are two levels, I would say. One is the level of the real impact of freedom of movement, and the other one is how it is perceived. I will just say one thing; according to the data, the people who actually move, who use the freedom of movement, it's only 3% of the whole population of the European Union. So, sociologically speaking, there is a much lower level of interstate mobility, then I think, what we have in the United States.

**Teresa Pullano** 15:40

Nevertheless, I think that freedom of movement is really the cornerstone of the whole European architecture. Because without freedom of movement, there could not be [European citizenship]. Because European citizenship means a sharing of rights, the moment in which a nation of a member state steps into the territory of another member state.

**Teresa Pullano** 16:08

So without freedom of movement, there would be no European citizenship; many of the other rights of the EU and many of the practices that brought EU to life would just not exist. So I think it's not only central fundamental rights for EU citizens, but it's really the mechanism through which this form of EU statehood or through which Europe is functioning. And I think that this is perceived by the citizens. I think that freedom of movement has been so far, really the most important achievement of Europe, to the eyes of the citizens. And as you might know, there is this program for university students called Erasmus. And this has had a very strong end, and it entail steps that students can take semesters in a university of another member states and then finish their degree at their home home university. And this has been really very much widely used. Now, as I say, the 3% are also this example of the Erasmus.

**Teresa Pullano** 17:25

Sometimes, some populists have used that freedom of movement is seen as something that pertains only to a certain elite among European citizens. So there is somehow a class divide in this sense. But for me I just want to say briefly two things; one is that the centrality of freedom of movement in the legal and political architecture of the European Union is shown by the fact that the Brexit referendum (but also here in Switzerland: the initiative for the control of immigration in Switzerland as an associated member of the European Union), they have insisted precisely on blocking freedom of movement for EU citizens. This has been one of the central arguments for the United Kingdom: "We cannot accept anymore that we don't have any control over who can come into our territory, be it French or German or Italian or Romanian citizens." So I think that the attack to some extent on Europe that Brexit has been for me, has been precisely an attack to freedom of movement. And this shows how central this is.

**Teresa Pullano** 18:37

And I would like to add another point, which is a more philosophical point to some extent. I have analyzed in my own work freedom of movement within Europe, as a manifestation of a change in forms of political power. I draw upon the work of Michel Foucault here, and in all the debates about philosophy after pandemics, I am on the side of those who think that biopolitics and the what the categories thought by Michel Foucault are really central.

**Teresa Pullano** 19:13

I think that we need to look at the European Union as a form of government in which state power does not consist anymore on blocking or on controlling citizens and fixing them within the nation state's territory. Rather, for me, the model of European Union governance is exactly what Foucault has called pastoral power. So it consists in making people move and managing the circulation of people, as one would manage the circulation of, for example, diseases (as Foucault was discussing about smallpox or famine.) And in this sense, I think that the coronavirus situation really shows that. And I think it's quite telling that resorting to classical Weberian understanding of closing the borders, making the people not moving and controlling them in a fixed way, has resulted in an economic catastrophe. Now in the second wave of coronavirus, European states are trying to do the opposite, that is to controlling and making a triage of circulations of people.

**John Torpey** 20:41

I see. So you don't really see the sort of reassertion of border controls in the context of the pandemic as the reassertion of national nation state power so much? I mean, is this [reassertion of border controls] undermining the kind of perception of the European Union as an entity that brings together all the citizens of the member states of the European Union?

**Teresa Pullano** 21:10

Yes, I think that the fact that borders have been closed in the first wave of the pandemic has been used by the nationalist forces. I think that the nationalist or the sovereignist forces have manipulated these panic responses by European governments, and they have tried to say, "okay, you see that what really matters is the nation state, you see that to save lives, what really matters is closing the borders."

**Teresa Pullano** 21:51

But I think that this has been more manipulation than a reality for two reasons. The first one is that we have seen, and Europe is doing this now, that the point is not really closing the borders to control the disease. The point is to control the disease, while at the same time making it possible for people to move. And this is a very different problem, in terms of the question of what power what government is. And the second point is that the nationalist response of closing the borders and of stopping everything has created another problem, which is a huge, immense economic problem. And this has triggered the response of the recovery fund. So this has triggered the response by the European Commission and its President Ursula von der Leyen in saying "we need a common European response to the pandemic. It is not possible that the response is a national response that tears apart the internal market, that tears apart the fundamental freedoms.

**Teresa Pullano** 23:05

So to some extent, it's also a struggle over what is freedom, what does freedom mean. And I think that the European Union's elite understood that it was too dangerous, on the one hand economically, on the other hand politically, to offer such a possibility to the nationalist forces to say: "look, European Union is not able to deal with this question, we need to go back to border controls." And this is precisely why they came up with the recovery fund.

**Teresa Pullano** 23:44

Okay, well, that's what I wanted to ask you about next is precisely this phenomenon of the recovery fund. After the usual kind of acrimony between the creditor and debtor nations and the Frugal Four, as we call them in the US, and that sort of thing. The European Union did ultimately agree on an extraordinary package of economic measures to stabilize the economies of its member states in the face of the pandemic. So would you explain more about that and how novel that is, and what you think the implications of it are? I mean, many people saw this as a decisive turning point, because the money is given to the debtor nations in the form of grants rather than loans, etc. So could you explain what happened there and what it all means?

**Teresa Pullano** 24:37

Yeah. Well, first of all, I think that the recovery fund had a very strong performative effect. I think of the effect because the money had still not issued. So, so far, there is a decision taken and the announcement. But this was somehow enough. The acknowledgement that there is an interconnection at the European level (and that the response to the pandemic had to take into account the political, economic and social interconnection of member states) had per se, the effect of stabilizing and legitimizing the European Union against eurosceptic forces. And this is why I compare the announcement by Von der Leyen concerning the recovery fund, to Mario Draghi's very famous sentence during the Eurozone crisis of "I will do whatever it takes to save the Euro." For me Von der Leyen and the recovery fund are saying "we will do whatever it takes to save the European Union." So it's more for me, until now, a performative assertion rather than something real and concrete.

**Teresa Pullano** 25:56

Nevertheless, there are various elements [to consider]. So far, the announcement of the recovery fund has made it possible, associated with the suspension of the fiscal pact within the Maastricht treaty (so the suspension the rule that member states cannot exceed 3% of debt with respect to the GDP). This has made it possible for some countries like Italy, for example, to already use this funding, or use the promise of this funding, to lend money to the citizens during the pandemic or to make state interventions for big state companies that were collapsing. For example, for Alitalia, the airplane flagship company of Italy, which is the only one carrier that is working right now for Italy during the pandemic. Italy could put money into it right now, because of the recovery fund, and because of the suspension of the Maastricht criteria. So the recovery fund is already acting, even though the money is not there yet.

**Teresa Pullano** 27:12

And what is really new is that the recovery fund is a complete U turn with respect to the austerity politics. Because the logics so far in Europe of the 3% rule of Maastricht treaty and the political logic that we have seen in place during the Greek crisis. For example, the logic was, as Angela Merkel has always said, "everyone needs to do their homework, member states need to put their data under control. And then, only once this is done, the EU will intervene."

**Teresa Pullano** 27:49

Here we have another kind of reasoning with the recovery fund. The reasoning I see is that not only money will be given to member states according to the needs. And it will not only be loans, but rather the European Union and the European Central Bank are using their power over the markets to grant the best possible conditions for this money to go to the member states. So this is the real difference. The difference is that money here is understood not as the expression of member states' economic health, but rather as a consequence of the power of the European Union in the global markets. And then these will help the different member states.

**Teresa Pullano** 28:43

But the other key point for me in the logic of the recovery fund, but also of this other instrument, which is already active, which is called SURE, and which concerns unemployment funds. Or the ESM, which is also another instrument that member states could use, again, to get loans within the markets at a very convenient tax, because this money will be granted by the European Central Bank.

**Teresa Pullano** 29:17

What I see also as the key point is that recovery fund has the political goal of making a work of rebuilding the infrastructure across Europe. So it's not only Europe, acting as a lender of last resort for member states, but it's also the promise that there will be a European coordination for intervening with the logistic infrastructures, with train routes, auto routes in within Europe, but also the health infrastructure. The recovery fund is also aimed at re-putting back into shape the health system across member states, but also the digital infrastructure. So it's really more a form of intervention, economic intervention and structural intervention, where we see the possibility of a different understanding of the relationship between the public and the private, the European and the national and the local.

**Teresa Pullano** 30:35

Fascinating, thank you very much. But in the interest of saving your voice for your teaching obligations, perhaps I'll ask one final question. And that is sort of looking forward from these various developments that you've been describing.

**John Torpey** 30:54

We've had this recent announcement, as I'm sure you know, about the vaccine from the company, Pfizer, and a German company, BioNTech, and indications that if their vaccine is as effective as they seem to have found in their clinical trials, this bodes well for other vaccine manufacturers who are using the same technique that of messenger or RNA technique. So it may be possible to begin thinking slowly, cautiously about what life is going to be like after the pandemic. So I wonder, you know, how you see Europe coming out of this, this crisis, which, you know, is hardly over, and it's not going to be over for a while yet. But, what would you say about, Europe post-pandemic?

**Teresa Pullano** 31:46

Yeah, I think that Europe and also the United States will come out of the pandemic, with an economy that is completely destroyed. The losses of the economy will be really, really very high. So there will be really the task of rebuilding the economy. And I think that, as I said, the recovery fund points to a direction of getting rid of these austerity measures.

**Teresa Pullano** 32:21

Emmanuel Macron already asked for the fiscal obligations of the Maastricht Treaty should not to be reinstated for the whole 2021. So I think that, for me, the crucial point is that I want to see if the European elite understands that austerity measures need to be something of the past. And I think that with the economic situation that we will face after the pandemic, this will be a necessity. I think that Brexit (we will have to see what happens with a post Brexit negotiations) but Brexit in this sense (I'm sorry to say it, and I think of course, it's horrible that the United Kingdom is not anymore a member state) but I think the Brexit is also a good thing in this respect, because with Boris Johnson at the table, nothing like the recovery fund could have been agreed upon. So I think that there is this crisis, different crises, are putting European elites in a forced position of turning their back to austerity policies. Now the question will be which kind of economic order will then be implemented in Europe? And I think that one of the essential struggles will be on the welfare measures at the European level.

**Teresa Pullano** 33:56

Will unemployment be tackled? Unemployment will be a key problem for Europe after the recession. Will it be tackled also at the level of the European Union? Because unfortunately, a very sad scenario could be that stronger states like Germany, and to some extent, France, take advantage of the states that will get out of this pandemic, with their bones broken like Italy, for example. This is a very sad scenario. I think that we are not there. But I want to see how these measures for rebuilding an infrastructure at the European level and how the measures for unemployment will really have a European dimension of solidarity and cohesion. And I think the struggle will be all over the shapes of this instrument.

**Teresa Pullano** 34:52

And one last point. I think that what is happening in the US will also be decisive for the state of Europe post pandemic. The transition to the Biden administration, will have a central impact on the Brexit negotiation. What will Boris Johnson do with the Biden administration? This leaves Britain really alone a little bit now. So I think that we have to see at the same time what happens in Europe, but also which kind of global order at least for Western capitalism and for and for the West Biden has in mind, and how these will impact over Europe. And how all also the current very uncertain situation in the US will impact over Europe.

**John Torpey** 35:47

Fascinating. Thank you very much. I want to thank Teresa Pullano of the University of Basel for her insights about the situation in Europe and what it's become and where it may be going post pandemic. I also want to thank Merrill Sovner of the EU Studies Center for helping produce this episode, and Hristo Voynov for helping on the technological side. I also want to thank the Otto Walter Foundation for its support of our endeavors. Please subscribe to International Horizons on Apple podcasts, Spotify and SoundCloud and leave us a review. This is John Torpey of the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies saying we look forward to having you with us next time on International Horizons.