



Historical analogies and general theoretical schemes in the study on contemporary international relations: anachronism or opportunity?

Jacek Więclawski¹ 

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Abstract

This article discusses the plausibility of historical analogies and general theoretical schemes in the study on contemporary international processes. It explains how the complex character of contemporary international relations modifies the previous role of theoretical generalizations and lessons from the past. The uncertainty of contemporary international processes, including the waves of global economic, social and political turbulences, makes the general theoretical schemes more tentative. It reduces the role played by historical analogies which become more risky and potentially inconclusive. They change their initial explanatory functions. The novelty and past experience intertwine in the analysis of contemporary international phenomena, yet the elements of uncertainty and novelty prevail. Theories respond to these challenges with flexibility and pragmatism, including some “middle ground” positions. Their ideas are valuable, but do not change the article’s conclusion that general theoretical schemes and historical analogies offer a limited practical advice in the study on contemporary international relations.

Keywords International relations · Theories · Historical analogies · Theoretical schemes · Generalizations · Predictability · COVID-19

Introduction

General theoretical schemes and historical analogies have so far served to explain the world of international relations and make sense of international problems. In practice, general theoretical models (and especially those on the nature of the international system) became exaggeratedly parsimonious while politicians tended to “(...) invoke inappropriate analogues that not only fail to illuminate the new situation but

✉ Jacek Więclawski
jack.wieclawski@wp.pl; jacek.wieclawski@uwm.edu.pl

¹ Institute of Political Science, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Feliksa Szrajbera 11, 10-007 Olsztyn, Poland



also mislead by emphasizing superficial and irrelevant parallels” (Khong 1992: 12). Yet both schemes and analogies promised to introduce some rationality and predictability into the study on international relations and master the complexity of the international world.

The end of the Cold War warned that this promise could be false (Cox 2011: 643–644). The ambitious systemic and structural schemes appeared too rigid to explain the nuances of the Soviet Union’s fall while the post-Cold War international system has not necessarily been much like the previous international orders, irrespective of their balance of power or hegemonic nature. The international reality at the beginning of the twenty-first century modifies the role of general theoretical schemes and historical analogies even further. It becomes complex and dynamic and introduces a high degree of uncertainty into the course of international processes. It faces contemporary theories with a number of novel phenomena which may modify (and reverse) the social, political and economic trends. The example of the global economic crises (which tend to repeat every decade) illustrates that each of them shares some similarity with the previous episodes, but reveals a number of new and specific features. Sometimes, they become “black swans”—rare and untypical even in the new international environment (Taleb 2007: xvii–xviii).

The article notes that the reference to the past may offer some useful insights about social, psychological or normative aspects of contemporary international phenomena (Brands and Suri 2016: 2, 12; Kornprobst 2007: 42). Yet in the international reality after the end of the Cold War historical analogies become a source of misperception and mistakes which may ignore the variable nature and real causal mechanisms behind contemporary international processes (Yin 2020: 260–261, 264). Besides, the reference to the past departs from its initial explanatory function and serves more ideological purposes, including justification and legitimization of leaders’ political decisions (Mumford 2015: 5, 9–12). The new wave of globalization and digitalization at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Sogani 2020: 1–2, Strauss-Kahn 2020: 6–7) accelerates the course of international interactions and makes the reference to historical experience more risky and potentially inconclusive.

In a similar vein, the complexity of contemporary international relations makes general theoretical conclusions problematic, especially in contrast to the “stark symmetry” and “pleasing simplicity” of the bipolarity order (Waltz 1993: 74). Many attempts of generalizations become tentative, ad hoc and prone to uncertainty and novelty of contemporary international processes. The novelty and uncertainty challenge previous regularities and schemes in the study on international affairs. They provoke a debate about the nature of change itself since the changes considered today as profound may shortly be replaced by new and more fundamental ones (Holsti 2016: 40–43, 46). They make the reference to general theoretical schemes difficult, risky and less plausible than two or three decades ago.

The article appreciates flexibility offered by some recent “middle ground” theoretical approaches which open more space to unit-level variables, favour context-oriented analysis and methodological pragmatism. They help to comprehend the complex nature of contemporary international processes and try to predict their course (Freyberg-Inan et al 2009: 14–15; Bernstein et al 2000: 53–54). It indicates some valuable insights offered by the “forward looking” research strategy, to reduce the



impact of uncertainty in the study on contemporary international processes (Bernstein et al 2000), as well as the considerations about a functional equivalence in contemporary comparative studies, including the comparability of historical analogies (Van de Vijver 1998; van Deth 1998). Yet it does not change the paper's principal conclusion that the international reality at the beginning of the twenty-first century is not an environment conducive to general theoretical claims and historical analogies. They are not entirely anachronistic, but offer a limited practical advice in the study on contemporary international relations.

The article consists of four parts. It discusses the experience from the end of the Cold War and a number of new problems for historical analogies and general theoretical schemes in the post-Cold War period. A separate part deals with similarities and differences in the global economic turbulences in the last two decades. It illustrates that despite some similarities (mainly between the 2008 global financial crisis and the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic) the aspects of novelty prevail over the past experience and the lessons learned from the previous episodes may not necessarily be a guidance to comprehend the new waves of global economic turbulences.

The end of the Cold War—challenges for general theoretical schemes and historical analogies in the study on international relations

The end of the Cold War was surprising to “almost everyone” (Gaddis 1992/93: 5; Ikenberry 2001: 215), yet it was a special problem for general theoretical schemes of international relations. Developed by a number of systemic theories they identified some “essential” rules, regularities and mechanisms which constituted the international system and its operation (Holsti 1989: 19–20). The reference to schemes of international processes introduced more rigour, verifiability and predictability into the study on international affairs and helped to comprehend the logic of the Cold War confrontation (Gaddis 1992/93: 7–8; Holsti 1989: 19–20). The initial systemic considerations took the form of ambitious structural models in the 1980s. Developed by structural realism they identified fundamental patterns of a state's foreign policy—adequate to its place in the international system and independent of its domestic character or historical experience (Gaddis 1992/93: 9). They assumed strong regularities in states' response to systemic impulses and leaders' limited (if any) ability to modify constraints imposed by the international system (Holsti 2016: 37–38; Herrmann and Lebow 2004: 14–15).

Yet domestic (inside the Soviet Union) and international processes in the late 1980s appeared more complex and dynamic than the general theoretical models. The end of the Cold War was unique—determined by a specific configuration of causes—and, in line with William C. Wohlforth, difficult to explain “as an instance of a general law” (Wohlforth 1994/95: 91–94; Herrmann and Lebow 2004: 14). It was a challenge for strong structural models which became too static and parsimonious to explain the course of international affairs at that time. In a similar vein, the peaceful collapse of the Soviet state undermined strong structural realist claims about the stability of the bipolar order which “(...) fostered the expectation that the



cold war would end in a cataclysmic confrontation or not at all (which is to say, not in the foreseeable future)” (Jones 2009: 225).

As a result, the Cold War’s ending challenged the “stark symmetry” and “pleasing simplicity” of the bipolarity order (Waltz 1993: 74) and the previous theoretical parsimony of structural perspectives (Jones 2009: 231). It marked a tendency of departure from “universal” rules and patterns of international affairs towards a more contingent, path-dependent and context-oriented study which respects some unit-level variables. The latter include the nature of states and their political systems as well as the quality of leaders and their perception of international affairs (Herrmann and Lebow 2004: 6, 14–18; Taliaferro et al 2009: 7–8, 28–30). The growing complexity of international relations after the end of the Cold War confirmed that the general and systemic models could be too parsimonious to analyse more comprehensive international processes and asked a more fundamental question about theories’ ability “(...) to move beyond ritual invocations of concepts that once had theoretical and descriptive uses, but that are no longer able to capture those things that are truly new and novel in the world” (Holsti 2016: 38=40).

The debate on the “return to multipolarity” and the opposite claims about the unprecedented nature of the US unipolarity revealed a lack of theoretical consensus even in the same (realist) theoretical camp as well as some problems with the application of the old theoretical concepts in the new international reality (Harrison, 2009: 77=78, 83=84). Although the preponderance of the US power, and first of all its military aspects, was unprecedented at the beginning of the 1990s (Jervis 2009: 189; Wohlforth 1999: 24), the nature of this power, and the idea of power itself, tended to evolve towards a more nuanced and multifaceted concept (Kornprobst 2007: 45). The international order became unipolar together with the end of the Cold War (Ikenberry 2001: 233; Ikenberry et al 2009: 1=4), but a number of ambitious actors present in the system (including the EU and China) suggested that its further shape could be more complicated (Harrison 2009: 88–89, 96–98).

In a similar vein, the end of the Cold War was a poor case for historical analogies. The fall of the bipolar order was a “revolutionary” and “turning” point—difficult to compare to other (similar) processes in the modern history (Herrmann and Lebow 2004: 14; Wohlforth 1994/95: 91–94). It was a challenge to the previous narrative about the “long peace” which the bipolar balance of power generated (even if as the by-product of the Cold War rivalry) as well as its stability and predictability (Gaddis 1992/1993: 32; Cox 2011: 631=633). Further, it provoked fears about a return to the turbulent nature of the multipolar order in Europe in the 1930s as well as ethnic and territorial tensions typical for that period and policymakers “(...) often felt impelled to look backwards and to think of the present through the prism, or prisms, of the past” (Cox 2011: 636–637, 643). Yet analogies were scarce and the reach for them risked misperception. The nature of the 1930s and some general lessons from the fall of great empires encouraged cautiousness, but offered limited practical advice (Cox 2011: 637–638, 643). The reference to historical analogies, distant and inadequate to the international reality in the late 1980s, could not explain the nuances of the collapse of the Soviet state and the end of the Cold War period. It was, in line with Michael Cox, less a lesson of policymakers as “masters in their own house” and more a picture of



leaders who “were pulled here and pushed there by developments over which they seemed to have very little real control at all” (Cox 2011: 642–644).

The international affairs after the end of the Cold War become more complex than the “pleasing simplicity” of the bipolar order (Waltz 1993: 74). The growing dynamics of international processes complicates the application of the previous general theoretical schemes. It reduces the predictive ambitions of systemic theories and introduces a greater degree of unpredictability into the analysis of international interactions. The modesty and parsimony of the systemic schemes helped to deal with the course of the bipolar confrontation (Gaddis 1992/93: 5–9; Jones 2009: 231). In a sense, in line with Hans Mouritzen, the Waltz’s structural theory “(...) had been tailored to the peculiarities of super-power bipolarity” (Mouritzen 2009: 165). Yet the complexity of international relations after the end of the Cold War makes it difficult to close them into some general and parsimonious theoretical claims and “(...) predictions about the fates of states and their systems become harder to make” even for the previous prominent structural realists (Waltz 1993: 72–73). Besides, the return to domestic nuances of foreign policymaking opens more space for miscalculations, including the misperception of power relations in the leaders’ decisions which may affect the way in which states react to the international system and its impulses (Taliaferro et al 2009: 7–8, 29–30).

In a similar vein, international relations after the end of the Cold War complicate the reference to historical analogies, change some of the analogies’ functions and contribute to difficulties with their integration into concise theoretical frames. The departure from the previous systemic schemes to a more context-oriented analysis means opening to historical determinants of international processes, including states’ historical experience (Taliaferro et al 2009: 16–17, 19). Yet the post-Cold War international system is not much like the previous international orders, irrespective of their balance of power or hegemonic nature.

The end of the Cold War marked a primacy of the US power and a period of the US unipolarity (Ikenberry 2001: 233; Ikenberry et al 2009: 1–4). The unipolar orders were not, in line with William C. Wohlforth, Stuart J. Kaufman and Richard Little, completely strange in the premodern and non-western history (Wohlforth et al 2007: 19–21). Yet the US preponderance of power and its position in the international system has been (at least in the 1990s) unprecedented—different than any balance of power logic but also unlike a hegemony or an imperial order (Wohlforth 1999: 9; Ikenberry et al 2009: 4, 6; Lemke 1997: 23). Besides, scholars tend to agree that “there is no reason to expect unipolar systems to be identical” (Jervis 2009: 192) and the US domination often depends on some specific features of contemporary international processes (including the globalized economy) and the nature of the US political system itself (Jervis 2009: 189–190, 200–204; Ikenberry et al 2009: 17–18, 25–26). Hence, it also means that a potential departure from the US unipolar order, together with the US overextension and the rise of other international actors (and mainly China) may not be a reflection of any previous theoretical schemes or self-fulfilling scenarios. It does not have to be, in line with the recent analysis of Graham Allison, a falling into the “Thucydides trap” and a brutal form of the US–China hegemonic confrontation (Allison 2015; Yin 2020: 258, 263 = 264).



On the other hand, it may not be a simple “return of balance-of-power politics a la multipolarity” (Wohlforth 1999: 38).

Finally, the dynamics and uncertainty of international relations at the beginning of the twenty-first century make the difficulties with the reference to general theoretical schemes and historical analogies even more complex. In a political sense, the rise of China and a number of the US problems in Iraq and Afghanistan make the picture of the international order much more complicated than at the beginning of the 1990s (Harrison 2009: 88–89, 96–98; Yin 2020: 258, 263–264). The global nature of economic phenomena becomes obvious, yet, in line with Werner Kampeter, a number of short-term and speculative capital movements provoke much higher volatility, excessive fluctuation and panics on the financial markets and tend to contribute “nothing to the allocation of capital in order to increase the productivity of our economies” (Kampeter 2011: 23). The global chains in distribution of goods have accelerated the world of international interactions while the processes of digitalization affect social relations and various aspects of everyday life (Sogani 2020: 1–2; Strauss-Kahn 2020: 6–7).

The novel phenomena make social, political and economic trends temporary, challenge the previous regularities and schemes in the study on international affairs and make them less plausible than two or three decades ago (Holsti 2016: 44). They reduce the role of historical analogies and provoke a debate about the nature of change in today’s world since the changes considered as profound may (as the evolution of technology illustrates) shortly be replaced by new and more significant ones (Holsti 2016: 40–43). The complexity and dynamics of contemporary international relations do not necessarily mean a rejection of more general theoretical conclusions or sensitivity to historical aspects of contemporary international processes. Yet they make reaching for such conclusions and analogies much more difficult and potentially inconclusive.

Historical analogies and contemporary international relations: the wisdom from the past or inappropriate recommendations for the future?

The end of the Cold War marked a departure from the focus on the international system, its structure and some verifiable schemes of its operation. It opened more space for historical analogies, brought history back to the study on international relations (Vaughan-Williams 2005: 115–116, 132; Kornprobst 2007: 34–35) and reminded that “the goals leaders seek, the strategies they choose (...), and their success or failure, are dependent on the broader political context” (Herrmann and Lebow 2004: 6).

The reference to the past in the post-Cold War international reality offers some useful insights about the dynamics of international (and domestic) processes and helps in “making the world intelligible” (Kornprobst 2007: 32–34, 41–43). It may reveal some social, psychological and normative aspects of political decisions—far from the rigid structural perspective. It offers some help in understanding challenges, making sense of uncertainty and “unfamiliar” international environment (Brands and Suri 2016: 2, 12; Kornprobst 2007: 42). Besides, and despite the



structural theories' focus on the constraints imposed by the international system, Jeffrey Record indicates that "Reasoning by historical analogy has played a significant role in the formulation and implementation of US foreign policy since the end of World War II, especially on matters involving consideration or actual use of force" (Record 1998: 1).

Indeed, the use of the past to make sense of today's problems and deal with challenges of the future has been a subject of an active debate in contemporary international relations. Scholars indicate several aims and functions which historical analogies serve. The most obvious is to explain the nature of contemporary international affairs (Mumford 2015: 12). The reference to the past helps to understand the present "through the vehicle of history" (Cox 2011: 643) and offers a "shortcut to rationality" when studying political problems (Jervis 2017: 220). Further, historical analogies help "to deal with a causal complexity" of international processes and make them more familiar to decision-makers (Khong 1992: 7–8; Ghilani et al 2017: 280). The latter function becomes fundamental in periods of "high perceived uncertainty" when, in line with Halvard Leira, the reference to historical examples helps "to make the world intelligible" (Leira 2017: 7).

In a similar vein, historical analogies help to identify options available to solve contemporary international problems and deal with challenges of the future. They introduce some sense of predictability to leaders' decisions and states' foreign policy (Ghilani et al 2017: 280; Mumford 2015: 11). They may be useful to evaluate different political scenarios, define a chance for each option's ultimate success and warn about potential dangers which the scenarios may bring about (Mumford 2015: 12; Neustadt and May 1988: xv). Hence, they may affect the selection of foreign policy choices and leadership's decision-making (Khong 1992: 9–10).

Yet the "return to history" in international relations reveals some obvious challenges with the "wisdom from the past" and the guidance it may offer for contemporary political processes. The problems with leaders' inappropriate selection of analogies have been considered earlier, including Ernest May's works, and the end of the Cold War does not considerably change the general conclusion that that policymakers tend to "use history badly" (May 1973: xi; Ghilani et al 2017: 276). It confirms that political leaders may not use history "as historians might like them to use it" (Brands and Suri 2016: 2).

The international reality after the end of the Cold War illustrates that the reach for historical analogies may still be selective, lose a deeper context of post-Cold War international processes and result in some simplistic and one-dimensional interpretations (Brands and Suri 2016: 2, 11–12; Kornprobst 2007: 32, 42–43). It warns that the reference to historical analogies to make sense of contemporary international relations may provoke ambiguities and misperception as well as a number of "inappropriate analogues that not only fail to illuminate the new situation but also mislead by emphasizing superficial and irrelevant parallels" (Khong 1992: 4–8, 12). Hence, even if "historical analogies can helpfully inform policy" many policymakers are, in line with Jeffrey Record, "(...) historically illiterate, and most that are well read make policy decisions, just like their untutored brethren, primarily on the basis of considerations having nothing to do with the perceived lessons of past experience" (Record, 1998: 1).



Besides, the reality of international relations after the end of the Cold War reveals a clear tendency to use historical analogies in an instrumental way. They are a political instrument employed by leaders to generate support for their political agenda, a means of persuasion and a way to change peoples' attitude to contemporary problems (Ghilani et al 2017: 277, 281; Brands and Suri 2016: 2). They became a source of justification and legitimization of leaders' decisions and states' foreign policy (Mumford 2015: 2; Ghilani et al 2017: 281). Historical analogies serve in this context to legitimate leaders' action by a reference to some previous successful decisions or political strategies (Ghilani et al 2017: 281; Cox 2011: 643). They may offer some "historical truths" which strengthen a sense of community or a group identity (Ghilani et al 2017: 279–281), mobilize public opinion and frame political decision "in an appealing fashion" (Brands and Suri 2016: 2). Finally, the reference to the past may play some ideological functions and legitimate leaders' choices again. In line with Andrew Mumford, "over the last decade analogies in policy making and in wider public debate have become far more politicised than before" (Mumford 2015: 2). Historical analogies and historical metaphors may serve in this regard to control the political message and narrative about contemporary problems (Mumford 2015: 5, 9), and because they "can be so powerful and evocative, there is a temptation for policymakers to invoke them less as an opening for critical inquiry than as a blunt rhetorical object" (Brands and Suri 2016: 12).

Furthermore, the reach for historical analogies provokes a broader question about bias and equivalence in contemporary comparative studies (Van de Vijver 1998: 42–44). Despite the obvious interest in the historical context of contemporary international processes, some scholars remain hesitant about comparisons of distant historical events (Kornprobst 2007: 47). They warn that differences between distant time periods may prevail over similarities and "lessons" to be learned from the past while historical analogies may simply fail in identifying and comparing fundamental mechanisms of the past and present politics (Brands and Suri 2016: 4, Yin 2020: 258). Hence, "(...) reasoning by historical analogy can be dangerous, especially if such reasoning is untempered by recognition that no two historical events are identical and that the future is more than a linear extension of the past" (Record 1998: 1).

Theorists in comparative politics point out that since even the similar phenomena will never be identical the search for identity must be replaced with the search for equivalence (van Deth 1998: 4–5). The latter refers more to "the relevance of relationships" than the "intrinsic properties of concepts" and, in line with Jan W. van Deth, needs to cross "the traditional border" between quantitative and qualitative research (van Deth, 1998: 2, 5–6). It becomes a complex attitude which combines relationship, inference and a common set of indicators used in the comparison (van Deth, 1998: 2–3, 9–11). In the case of international relations, however, to establish a set of equivalent indicators while comparing distant historical events and contemporary international processes remains difficult and a challenge in itself. It still makes historical analogies present in the discipline the analogies which compare "apples and oranges" (Van de Vijver 1998: 47–48; Kornprobst 2007: 33–34).

Finally, the question of historical analogies in international relations after the end of the Cold War becomes a problem of theoretical frames able to integrate the analogies into more general theoretical conclusions. The departure from the



rigid structural approach marked “a push in IR to historicise the theories, logics, and concepts with which international relations are studied” (Vaughan-Williams 2005: 116). The retreat from the “dominant positivism” has at the same time encouraged more epistemological reflectivism as well as a greater emphasis on contingent and context-oriented nature of contemporary international processes. Yet, in line with Markus Kornprobst, a number of post-structuralist perspectives today “shy away from endorsing particular historical analogies or aspects of them as useful vocabulary to make sense of the world” (Kornprobst 2007: 34). Historical analogies do not serve here to make the world more intelligible or reveal some objective truths. They help instead to illustrate how knowledge, power and their dominant interpretations are constructed and imposed. Yet this is more the case of “working and provisional truth” (Kornprobst 2007: 34–35) than any general theoretical claims and provokes doubts about the use of history in the study on contemporary international relations in a more rigorous and systematic way (Brands and Suri 2016: 16–17).

The beginning of the twenty-first century further complicates the reach for historical analogies and leaves limited space for the “wisdom from the past”. The growing number of global interactions affects the nature of the international system and modifies its institutions and mechanisms (Jervis 2009: 202). It introduces logic of complexity into the study on international affairs and makes the perspective of complex systems important to comprehend the course and determinants of contemporary international processes (Gunitzky 2013: 35–36). In a similar vein, the next waves of technological revolution contribute to acceleration of international relations (Sogani 2020: 1–2; Strauss-Kahn 2020: 6–7). They introduce more unpredictability into the course of international processes, especially in the last two decades, and complicate the reach for historical analogies to make sense of the world or “to deal with the immensely challenging and often frightening problems of the present era” (Brands and Suri 2016: 4–5). They challenge the previous function of the analogies as a “shortcut” to rationality of international problems (Mumford 2015: 10–12; Khong 1992: 7–8) since the rationality of global affairs today becomes problematic itself.

Besides, contemporary international relations face a growing variability and uncertainty which limit the role of historical analogies. The course of international affairs at the beginning of the new century confronts theorists with novelty since a number of phenomena able to cause considerable changes in the international system have grown in the last two decades. The recurring global economic crises or a series of social revolutions in different parts of the world are obvious in this regard. They complicate the course of international processes, introduce a high degree of uncertainty and reduce the previous use of analogies in making sense of new information or “unfamiliar international environment” (Kornprobst 2007: 42; Brands and Suri 2016: 12). They make the reference to theoretical schemes and historical analogies difficult, risky and problematic (Mumford 2015: 5–6; Leira 2017: 7). Some of the novel phenomena, as the example of the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates, become “black swans” (if use the Taleb’s concept)—hard to predict and unique even in the new international reality. They may considerably change our previous knowledge and reveal “our blindness” with respect to randomness of contemporary international interactions (Taleb 2007: xvii–xix). Finally, some phenomena, including



the level of digitalization or the artificial intelligence, face no historical analogies at all.

Further, the complexity of contemporary international relations increases the risk of misperception, misunderstanding and misleading conclusions from the historical analogies. It is the risk of “simplistic and overwrought readings of history” (Brands and Suri 2016: 11–12) as well as false lessons from the past which become counter-productive “(...) when they are based on a faulty understanding of the events that gave rise to them or are applied to situations where they are inappropriate” (Herrmann and Lebow 2004: 2). Contemporary international processes, as the example of global economic crises illustrates (Claessens et al 2010: 247–248, 262–263), reveal different causes, specific course and unique consequences which may not necessarily repeat in the future. This potentially reduces the use of historical analogies since the experience from dealing with a today’s case may not be helpful in understanding future ones. It complicates the identification of real causal mechanisms behind contemporary international phenomena as well (Yin 2020: 260–261, 264).

Moreover, the growing complexity and uncertainty of international relations at the beginning of the twenty-first century may intensify the tendency to use historical analogies instrumentally. The reference to the past departs from its explanatory function towards legitimization of leaders’ decisions as well as some ideological aims to justify their “ideological worldview” (Mumford 2015: 14–15; Ghilani et al 2017: 281). It risks becoming a source of simplistic narratives and messages to support new political aims or “an ex post facto justification for a policy already decided upon” (Brands and Suri 2016: 2, 4–5). The instrumental use of analogies reduces their practical application in the analysis of contemporary international problems. It makes the reference to the past a subject of potential manipulation by different interest groups—both in foreign and domestic politics. It translates historical analogies into the instrument of political competition since, in line with Leira, they may offer “alternative narrations” and “compete myths and metaphors” to support different political positions (Leira 2017: 2–3).

Finally, the beginning of the twenty-first century does not resolve the previous problems with more concise theoretical frames able to integrate historical analogies into more general theoretical conclusions. The call for pragmatism and some (ontological and epistemological) “middle ground” positions prevails in this regard (Freyberg-Inan et al. 2009: 14–15), but no consensus and no single dominant approach emerge. Some new theories in the previous mainstream paradigms propose an integration of contingent (and unit-level) aspects with some more rigorous, verifiable and positivist-oriented patterns of contemporary international processes (Freyberg-Inan et al. 2009: 5). Yet this idea becomes more and more difficult in the variable and unpredictable international reality at the beginning of the new century. Some other positions prefer more reflectivist approach which reveals nuances of contemporary international interactions and their perceptions by different social and political groups. They intend, however, to keep some practical usefulness of historical analogies (Kornprobst 2007: 32). Markus Kornprobst indicates in this regard a pragmatic and rhetorical approach which is far from the positivist “objective truths”, but at the same time believes that analogies may “constitute useful knowledge” and “help us make the world more intelligible” (Kornprobst 2007: 32–35). It is the idea



of useful analogies generated on the basis of methodological pluralism as well as open debate, “discussion and adjudication” (Kornprobst 2007: 32–35, 47). Yet the problem is that the instrumental use of historical analogies, political populism and a tendency in the political communication to use short and simplified messages may not encourage the public debate on the role of analogies as well.

Thus, Hal Brands and Jeremi Suri are right that “Historians may deplore the way that analogies are routinely misused in policy decisions, but it is unrealistic to think that analogies will ever be purged from that process” (Brands and Suri 2016: 12). Further, the reference to the past may still be useful if “treated with care”, carefully employed and as long as it is “viewed as an invitation to scrutiny and critical assessment, rather than a means of closing off such important intellectual work” (Brands and Suri 2016: 11–14). Yet, the reference to the past becomes more and more difficult in contemporary international relations and offers limited practical advice—far from being decisive in understanding complexity of contemporary international processes (Leira 2017: 2; Neustadt and May 1988: xiv–xviii). History may still be important for elites’ identities and choices, yet political leaders face today a dynamics and uncertainty which easily modify (and quite frequently reverse) their previous assumptions about social, political and economic phenomena. This makes the reference to historical experience risky and potentially inconclusive. The reach for historical analogies may be a source of mistakes, misperception and false predictions (Ghilani et al 2017: 276–277; Khong 1992: 7–8). It risks missing the real causal mechanisms behind the political processes (Yin 2020: 260–264). Besides, the international reality at the beginning of the twenty-first century may further increase the instrumental use of historical analogies for political and ideological competition (Mumford 2015: 5, 9). It complicates the debate about the role which the past may actually play in the study on contemporary international relations.

General theoretical schemes and the reality of post-Cold War international relations

The problems with ambitious structural schemes of international relations became obvious in the late 1980s since they were too static to comprehend the nuances of the fall of the Soviet state. In line with Ole R. Holsti, “(...) a spare structural approach suffers from an inability to identify completely the nature and sources of interests and preferences because these are unlikely to derive solely from the structure of the system” (Holsti 1989: 18–21). The collapse of the bipolar order and growing complexity of international relations in the 1990s confirmed that it was difficult to explain the nature of international processes by a single logic and a reference to some limited general theoretical assumptions (Harrison 2009: 85–86; Gaddis 1992/93: 55).

The departure from the strong systemic claims was indisputable and even for the previous structural realists the reference to states’ motives and intentions became necessary to understand their actual reaction to systemic constraints (James 1993: 135–136). The end of the Cold War did not mean a disregard for systemic frames of a state’s foreign policy and did not imply that changes at the unit level would be



decisive to shape the course of international affairs (Holsti 2016: 47–48). Yet, in line with Ernest R. May, Richard Rosecrance and Zara Steiner, “Domestic upheavals can reinforce or transform international relationships (...) and cannot be omitted from narrow considerations of power” (May et al 2010: 3). The number of impulses and restraints which may affect a state’s foreign policy goes far beyond some universal principles of politics or some parsimonious systemic schemes of international relations (May et al 2010: 1–2, 6; Rosecrance and Steiner 2010: 341).

Hence, the complexity of international relations after the end of the Cold War reduces theories’ ability to offer some general conclusions about the nature of the new international reality. The latter reveals some regularities and follows some trends, yet does not easily falls into new general schemes (Freyberg-Inan et al 2009: 10–11; Gaddis 1992/93: 9). It is more a coexistence of general and contingent aspects of international processes and a growing acceptance that their picture would be incomplete if not supplemented by unit-level and context-oriented variables. The reference to domestic nuances of foreign policymaking, however, makes general rules and schemes of international processes less plausible, difficult and potentially trivial (Holsti 2016: 44; Herrmann and Lebow 2004: 8–9). Finally, some random events and phenomena, which emerge in the post-Cold War international relations, may not be generalized and modelled at all (Bernstein et al 2000: 70).

The dynamics and uncertainty of international processes at the beginning of the twenty-first century reduce the plausibility of general theoretical schemes even further. The recurrence of novel phenomena makes the social, political and economic trends temporary and tentative. It may considerably affect, as the examples of the September 11 attacks and the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate, the previous course of international relations and question any previous general assumptions. It may challenge the fundamental terms and concepts used to explain the nature of contemporary international affairs (Holsti 2016: 44). Kalevi Holsti is therefore right that “Certainly nothing new develops without a past, but the characteristics of the new may be so different from anything proceeding that transformation is not an appropriate word. Replacement means novelty” (Holsti 2016: 46).

Consequently, recurring novel phenomena at the beginning of the new century make contemporary international relations difficult to be conceptualized in any theoretical terms (Dunne et al. 2013: 409, 419–420). The uncertainty of international processes makes a reference to general theoretical schemes problematic and translates into a departure in the study on international affairs towards a variety of case studies. This departure, however, provokes controversies since case studies offer valuable and comprehensive analysis of specific problems (domestic, local or regional), but rarely risk a formulation of general conclusions, including those about the nature and principal mechanisms of the international system. It asks a fundamental question about comparability of different case studies and “the sort of generalizable knowledge that is indispensable for a cumulative research programme and for the transfer of practical lessons across borders” (Steinberg 2015: 152–153). Finally, it faces contemporary theories (at least those rooted in the positivist tradition) with a challenge of offering some more general considerations, but at the same time respecting a broader, path-dependent and novel character of contemporary international processes (Herrmann and Lebow 2004: 17–18; Steinberg 2015: 155, 171).



There is no single optimal answer to this problem. Theories tend to respond to this challenge with a call for a “pragmatic approach” in the study on contemporary international relations. The latter favours problem oriented “middle ground” positions which integrate different levels of analysis and do not prioritize any variables. They depart from epistemological and methodological extremes and become sensitive to complex causes and determinants of contemporary international processes (Freyberg-Inan et al 2009: 14–15). Besides, Paul F. Steinberg is right that the concept of generalization needs reconsideration itself. It requires a departure from narrow statistical (and empirically falsifiable) understanding towards a broader one which reveals complex causal context of international problems, refers to various methodologies and applies both qualitative and quantitative research (Steinberg 2015: 153–154).

The flexibility of the “middle ground” approach seems a reasonable response in the face of unprecedented variability and uncertainty of contemporary international relations, despite some opposing voices pointing to the blurring of boundaries between different IR theories, reaching for methods and concepts from other social sciences and progressive hybridization of the international relations research (Wæver 2010: 299–303). It does not, however, reverse the criticism towards the entire discipline for its limited ability to comprehend the post-Cold War international reality (Wohlforth 1994/95: 91–94). Besides, even the “pragmatic approach” does not mean that the study on contemporary international relations aspires to offer any new general theoretical schemes. The experience of the last two decades reveals something different—a tendency among IR theories to formulate ad hoc and post factum explanations—in response to dynamic evolution of international affairs (Harrison 2009: 79; Freyberg-Inan et al 2009: 6). Most attempts of generalizations become tentative, prone to uncertainty and novelty of international processes and hardly adequate to new waves of global crises or other global changes. Ewan Harrison notes in the context of realism that different realist theories tend, in reaction to “the core dynamics taking place in the international system”, to offer opposed views and “(...) every three to four years positions regarded as unchallengeable orthodoxy are displaced by radically different and even diametrically opposed alternatives” (Harrison 2009: 79, 99).

Further, the uncertainty and novelty of contemporary international relations provoke a debate about the predictive function of IR theories and the role of general theoretical schemes in predicting the future course of international affairs. Theories, at least those which intend to keep some empirical verifiability of their assumptions, still need some generalizations and schemes able to explain, and potentially predict, the evolution of international processes (Dunne et al. 2013: 408–409). Yet, again, the problems of general theoretical models with predicting complex international phenomena were evident already in the late 1980s and, in line with Steven Bernstein et al., even “the most robust generalizations or laws” risk being close to trivial or producing “precious little in the way of useful, high confidence results” (Bernstein et al 2000: 44).

The post-Cold War international reality, and especially global processes at the beginning of the twenty-first century, introduces much more unpredictability into the course of international relations and reduce the previous “simplicity” of



the bipolar order (Waltz 1993: 73–74). It makes contemporary predictions less the application of ambitious theoretical models and more the adaption of theories to a far more unpredictable and complex world (Fomin et al 2020: 3–4). The uncertainty of contemporary international processes reduces the role which general theoretical models play in theories' predicting activity. It faces theoretical schemes with difficulties in accommodating novelty and discontinuity in contemporary international relations as well as a variety of causes which affect the course of international processes (Bernstein et al 2000: 71). In practice, the number of determinants which become crucial for the course and outcomes of social, political and economic phenomena grows and makes ambitious and point predictions almost impossible today (Bernstein et al 2000: 53, 70; Fomin et al 2020: 3).

Scholars respond to limited predictability of contemporary international relations with some new predictive concepts which combine general and contingent aspects of international problems and try to accommodate uncertainty typical for contemporary international processes (Gaddis 1992/93: 57–58; Fomin et al 2020: 4). Bernstein et al (2000) indicate in this regard a “forward looking” research strategy. It integrates some previous general and falsifiable hypotheses with knowledge on individual cases and predictive scenarios (narratives) which track trends and identify “chains of contingencies that could shape the future” (Bernstein et al 2000: 53–54, 59). The latter do not eliminate attempts of predictive generalizations, yet help to reveal more complex and dynamic causal relations in contemporary international processes. They “make contingent claims rather than point predictions” (Bernstein et al 2000: 54, 70–71) and (potentially) prevent the general theoretical assumptions from becoming trivial and parsimonious again.

This “forward looking” strategy confirms that some flexibility and pragmatism seems a right move in the study on contemporary international relations and makes a valuable contribution to some recent attempts to adapt theories to the “unpredictable world” (Fomin et al 2020: 19). The reference to a variety of variables (at different levels of analysis) and an increasing amount of information becomes necessary to comprehend the nature of contemporary international phenomena. Yet a reach for some more general theoretical conclusions is useful as well to avoid a conceptual stretching and keep theories' ability to identify the causes decisive for the future course of international processes. As Jiwu Yin indicates in the context of the US–China strategic rivalry and a number of aspects discussed in this regard “Retreating to the more abstract concept of great power competition is a useful way to avoid the conceptual stretching pitfall” (Yin 2020: 268).

Hence, theories need generalizations and a recent study by Fomin et al (2020) illustrates that a variety of “general predictive statements” (nomoscopic predictions) prevails in the research articles in the last two decades over the idioscopic predictions on specific units, problems or situations (Fomin et al 2020: 3–7, 19)—even if most of those general statements avoid risking short-term perspective and identifying a specific time span of their predictions (Fomin et al 2020: 7, 18–20).

Nevertheless, the complexity and dynamics of contemporary international relations make the reach for general theoretical conclusions difficult. The experience of the recurring waves of global economic turbulences in the last two decades (as



discussed in the next section) illustrates that the number of problems with unpredictability of contemporary international processes grows. It warns that the next “revolutionary” changes, including the social and financial consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, may further complicate theories’ ability to identify regularities, principal causes and causal links in contemporary international affairs. They may strengthen the inconsistency and ad hoc nature of theories’ theoretical considerations (Harrison 2009: 79; Freyberg-Inan et al 2009: 6) and further reduce their predictive function. In line with Tim Dunne, Lene Hansen and Colin Wight, “the idea that theories should be generalizable seems tenacious”, but the course and nature of future international processes may ultimately be so unique and complex that “nothing from the explanation is generalizable” (Dunne et al. 2013: 409).

Historical analogy vs. novelty—the example of the global economic crises

Recurring crises have been a permanent feature of the capitalist economy although at the beginning of the twenty-first century they become global and reveal a number of new and specific features. The examples of the 2008 global financial crisis and first of all the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate growing difficulties in finding a general and concise explanation for the complex nature of contemporary economic phenomena. The elements of novelty and the previous experience intertwine in both cases, yet the novel features of the 2020 turbulences, including the unprecedented nature of monetary and fiscal stimulus applied in response, seem to prevail over any “lessons from the past”. The explanation of some aspects of the COVID-19 crisis marks a departure from the previous “conventional wisdom” and understanding of rules, mechanisms and aims of economic policy (Bonatti et al. 2020a: 6–8, 13; Borio 2020: 11). In a similar vein, the experience of the current problems may not necessarily be an appropriate guidance to comprehend the sources, course and consequences of the next possible global economic turbulences.

Both the 2008 global financial crisis and the economic aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic share some similarities with the previous regional (and debt-caused) crisis episodes in the 1990s, yet reveal a number of different and unique features (Sogani 2020: 1; Strauss-Kahn 2020: 1). Despite their broader, global nature they become a result of “a multitude of factors” and a combination of their own specific causes (Claessens et al 2010, 247–248, 262–263). The core of the 2008 financial crisis was the central role of the household sector, the dynamic rise of leverage in the financial sector and the ultimate global problems with its liquidity. Yet it was also a case of some new “complex and opaque” financial and insurance instruments offered to rise the demand for the subprime mortgage loans (Rapisardi and Beiswenger 2020: 10; Claessens et al 2010: 247–248, 252–253). The response to the 2008 crisis was specific and novel again together with an unprecedented (then) scale of Quantitative Easing and other stimulus packages to increase the liquidity of the system and prevent massive bankruptcies (Cukierman 2021: 191–192; Blinder and Zandi 2015: 1–3). Yet even the post-2008 recovery revealed its specific nature with a number of



problems unsolved and not addressed until the next (2020) global crisis (Rapisardi and Beiswenger 2020: 11; Guillén 2020: 358–360). Hence, in line with Luigi Bonatti, Andrea Fracasso and Roberto Tamborini, the 2019 pandemic “(...) has caught the major economies, and the economic profession, in still convalescent state” (Bonatti et al. 2020a: 8).

The novelty of the 2020 economic crisis which follows the COVID-19 pandemic seems to be even more profound. Most obviously, it is rooted in non-financial and (generally) non-economic origins (Ozili and Arun 2020: 3; Rapisardi and Beiswenger 2020: 13) and becomes a case of a “(...) sudden eruption due to an unexpected public health crisis, enshrouded with uncertainty and leaving far-reaching, economic scars both in the real economy and the financial sector simultaneously” (Sogani 2020: 1–2). It is a result of an unprecedented shutdown of global economy and global societies (Rapisardi and Beiswenger 2020: 13) which concomitantly affects fundamental aspects of both a state’s social and economic policy (Sogani 2020: 1; Strauss-Kahn 2020: 5–6).

Hence, the 2020 economic crisis is not only the case of financial turbulences around subprime mortgages or liquidity of banking sector (as in 2008) but a more complex problem of the entire economies closed for different periods of time (Sogani 2020: 1; Borio 2020: 5). It affects both demand and supply sides of economy (Ozili and Arun 2020: 5; Strauss-Kahn 2020: 5–6) as well as disrupts global supply chains and complicates the entire global transportation web (Bonatti et al. 2020a: 11). The high level of interconnections among the world’s advanced economies as well as the dynamic evolution of global supply chains in production, transport and trade remain a specific feature of the global economy in the recent decade (Sogani 2020: 1–2; Strauss-Kahn 2020: 6–7). Yet the COVID-19 lockdown affects them considerably, and in line with Bonatti, Fracasso and Tamborini again, there is a general feeling that “the organisation of supply chains has revealed unsuspected fragilities” (Bonatti et al. 2020a: 11).

The measures applied in response to the COVID-19 economic turbulences, including a number of monetary and fiscal stimulus packages, become specific and in many cases novel as well. Besides, the post-pandemic economic recovery faces a number of uncertainties about duration, course and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic itself (Rapisardi and Beiswenger 2020: 13). To be sure, the financial instruments used in response to the 2020 global economic problems have not been completely new since a variety of Quantitative Easing programmes were launched during the 2008 crisis to increase the liquidity of the financial system and prevent a possible wave of companies’ fall (Cukierman 2021: 191–192). In a sense, their aim in the case of the COVID-19 turbulences has been similar—to prevent large bankruptcies (or even the collapse of the entire branches), to avoid a possible massive unemployment and to “buy time” in the face of the novel economic and social threats (Bonatti et al. 2020a: 6, 14–15; Guillén 2020: 359).

Yet the scale and size of the monetary and fiscal intervention in 2020 become unconventional and unprecedented since the stimulus packages and different asset purchasing programmes implemented by the FED alone will reach, according to different calculations, about \$6–9 trillion—a far above the level of the 2008 (Cukierman 2021: 184–187, 191; Guillén 2020: 360). In line with Alex Cukierman,



the severity of the COVID-19 economic turbulences has in many instances forced policymakers to ignore any previous fiscal rules and restrictions (Cukierman 2021: 197–198). Besides, the speed of governments' and central banks' response has been unusual, and following the speech of Claudio Borio, their monetary policy "has broken new ground" since "Central banks have gone one step further relative to the past, seeking to cover "the last mile" to reach businesses directly, including small and medium-sized enterprises" (Borio 2020: 1). In a similar vein, the reach for the extensive QE programmes in 2008 resulted in a dynamic increase in debts and deficits (Cukierman 2021: 182). Yet the rise of the global debt after the 2020 economic stimulus packages in the USA, Europe and other developed states becomes unprecedented again since "At the end of 2020, total debt reached 330 per cent of world Gross Domestic Product (GDP), well above the 269 per cent recorded in 2007" (Guillén 2020: 359).

The extensive (and unprecedented) fiscal and monetary intervention in 2020 reflects the recent arguments that a unique crisis requires an equally "extraordinary" response (Borio 2020: 1; Bonatti et al. 2020a: 8). For many scholars and observers, however, both the 2008 and 2020 economic stimulus packages marked a venture into "unknown and uncharted waters" (Guillén 2020: 359; Bonatti et al. 2020a: 28), and in line with Mary O'Sullivan, "The flood of liquidity into capitalism's financial system was remarkable in historical perspective, surpassing all previous records for monetary interventions, outside of wartime, since the beginning of the twentieth century" (O'Sullivan 2021: 2).

Hence, the aspects of novelty surpass the previous experience while discussing the recent global economic crises. The tools used by governments and central banks in response to the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic may not be completely new. Yet their scale and the way in which these instruments have been used since 2020 tend to depart from the previous "conventional wisdom" of economic and monetary policy. They challenge the previous practices considerably enough that "any assessment of present and future economic policy choices (...) should be aware of the profound modifications that the COVID-19 pandemic is creating in economic structures, economic processes, and transmission mechanisms of policy actions" (Bonatti et al. 2020a: 6–8). Paradoxically, the monetary policy which has so far been "deemed unconventional" becomes today "quite normal" and applicable for most rich and developed states (O'Sullivan 2021: 2).

Considering further economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of publications tend to agree that the pandemic introduces a higher level of uncertainty in the course of economic processes—including the post-pandemic recovery itself which depends on a variety of economic and non-economic factors concomitantly (Borio 2020: 1, 5–7; Guillén 2020: 365). There is, however, no strong belief that the measures applied in 2020 will actually be the most effective and proper ones, and in line with Bonatti, Fracasso and Tamborini, "Researchers in academia and official institutions are frantically seeking to understand how post-COVID-19 economies may look like and to organise new knowledge in a systematic and workable framework" (Bonatti et al. 2020a: 8).



A number of risks and lasting challenges emerge in this regard, including a growing inflation rate and first of all the problem of increased debt which may seriously affect the post-pandemic recovery (Borio 2020: 9–11; Bonatti et al. 2020b: 6, 21–25). In the case of Europe, for example, Charles Wyplosz indicates that “The European economy after COVID-19 will be very different from what it used to be. Most obviously, national public debts will have increased by some 15–30% of GDP” (Wyplosz 2020: 6). The uncertainty about the course of economic recovery after the COVID-19, as well as the scale of the fiscal and monetary stimulus already applied, may reduce any further governments’ and central banks’ flexibility as well (Borio 2020: 5–7, 10–11).

To be sure, some of the consequences of the stimulus packages have already been known in the 2008 crisis, yet the scale of the intervention in 2020 makes them more unpredictable. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated most of the previous negative trends while some of them “could even lead to a change in policy regime” (Borio 2020: 11). They provoke a new debate about the effectiveness of the instruments to be applied in the economic policy. Yet the analogies from 2008 may be problematic and potentially misleading in this regard since, in line with John J. Rapisardi and Jacob T. Beiswenger, “This time around, we may not be as lucky because of a confluence of events that have created a perfect economic storm”, including the huge amount of debt and a number of “zombie” unprofitable companies which the new stimulus packages prevent from bankruptcy (Rapisardi and Beiswenger 2020: 4–5).

Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic consequences may not be completely unique if compared with the experience of the 2008 global financial crisis and some previous episodes of regional economic turbulences. In a sense, the 2020 crisis reflects some unresolved problems and trends which “have been dragging for several decades” (Guillén 2020: 358–359). Nevertheless, the novelty of the COVID-19 pandemic and the global economic turbulences in the aftermath prevails over any previous experiences and historical analogies. The 2020 crisis reveals a number of unprecedented and unique features and the instruments applied by the governments and central banks in response introduce further unpredictability and uncertainty. It means that contemporary social and economic processes may indeed enter the “unknown waters” (Guillén 2020: 359) and the next global economic turbulences may face policymakers with even more unanticipated phenomena—the challenges which will further reduce the application of the experience, concepts and instruments from the past.

Conclusion

Historical analogies and general theoretical schemes are not completely anachronistic, but their ability to offer plausible explanations of contemporary international processes has clearly been reduced in the post-Cold War period. International relations at the beginning of the twenty-first century become dynamic and complex—far from the “pleasing simplicity” of the Cold War bipolarity (Waltz 1993: 74). The uncertainty and novelty of contemporary international processes



modify (and in some cases reverse) existing social, political and economic trends—much easier and more frequently than in the previous periods.

The dynamic and complex nature of contemporary international relations affect theories' ability to offer general theoretical conclusions and some new general theoretical claims tend to be temporary and tentative (Harrison 2009: 79; Holsti 2016: 44). They risk being misleading and trivial. The flexibility and pragmatism of some “middle ground” theoretical approaches help to reach beyond a single case study and retain some “generalizable knowledge” as well as strengthen theories' predictive abilities (Steinberg 2015: 152–153; Bernstein et al 2000: 53–54). Yet uncertainty and novelty of contemporary international processes make the reference to ambitious theoretical schemes difficult and reduce their practical application.

In a similar vein, the article remains sceptical of “the power of historical analogies”. The post-Cold War international reality opens more space for states' historical experience, but increases a danger of misleading and inappropriate lessons from the past. The reach for historical analogies may be useful when explaining some specific aspects of contemporary international interactions, but risks missing their complex causal mechanisms (Yin 2020: 260–261, 264). Further, the global processes at the beginning of the new century show limited resemblance to historical cases and reveal their own specific course and consequences. Some phenomena (as, for example, the unprecedented level of digitalization) face a shortage of historical analogies. Besides, the analogies themselves depart from their initial explanatory function and become a political instrument employed by political leaders to justify and legitimize their decisions and serve some ideological functions (Mumford 2015: 2; Ghilani et al 2017: 281).

The example of the global economic crises, including the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, illustrates that elements of novelty and the previous experience intertwine in the analysis, yet the novel phenomena, including the unprecedented nature of monetary and fiscal stimulus applied in 2020, prevail over the “lessons from the past”. Further, the explanation of the COVID-19 crisis departs from the previous conventional understanding of some economic mechanisms and processes (Bonatti et al. 2020a: 6–8, 13; Borio 2020: 11). It suggests that today's lessons and general theoretical conclusions may not translate into abilities to deal with the (specific and novel) problems of future economic turbulences. Finally, it warns that some processes and phenomena considered today as “breaking” may shortly be replaced by new and more profound ones (Holsti 2016: 41–44).

Declarations

Conflict of interest I state that there is no conflict of interest.



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