



Part four: introduction

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Introduction

The external relations dimension of the European integration process changed profoundly between 1986 and 2000. In part this reflected the more general transformation of the European Community (EC) into a European Union (EU): as the EC/EU did more and grew in importance, so too did its impact on its external partners increase, both within Europe and beyond, along with their interest in what was happening in Brussels. Greater external engagement, to put it another way, was an inevitable corollary of greater internal activity and dynamism. But the other crucial factor that shaped the EC/EU's changing foreign-policy profile was the wider geopolitical change brought about by German reunification, the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the consequent transformation of Europe. The dramatic events of 1989-1992 altered the EC/EU's international environment profoundly, and it had no choice but to respond. The debate within the Community/Union about how its new foreign-policy activism should be organised was also important. Few dissented from the notion that Europe had to improve its capacity to interact with the outside world, but there were profound disagreements about what type of institutional changes would best equip the EC/EU for this challenge.

The following chapter will seek to provide a flavour of how Europe responded. It will start with a section exploring the way in which Europe's new internal advance, but still more the continent's new geopolitics, transformed the debate about who should or could belong to the European Union. In 1986 it might have been possible to believe that the process of enlargement was all but complete. Once Spain and Portugal took their place within the EC in January of that year there were few other countries in western Europe able or likely to join in the foreseeable future. Within 4 years, however, the situation would change beyond recognition, with a substantial increase in the geographical size of the EC/EU already under way, and with much more enlargement likely in the future. The first such change was the need to incorporate the territory of the former East Germany; as Germany was reunified, what had been the German Democratic Republic needed to be incorporated into the EC/EU as well as into the Federal Republic of Germany. The first part of Chapter 20 will hence examine what amounted to a de facto enlargement, albeit one carried out much more quickly and in a very different way from all other rounds of enlargement. The chapter will then turn to another set of membership applications made possible by the end



Following the Treaty of Amsterdam, Javier Solana became the first High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Handshake between Javier Solana (left) and Commission President Romano Prodi (right).

of the Cold War, namely the entry of those neutral European states that had previously believed EC membership to be incompatible with their position between the two Cold War blocs. Austria, Finland and Sweden would all join in 1995. The next section will look at the slow countdown to the other, even bigger, round of enlargement made possible, or even likely, by the end of the East–West conflict, namely the incorporation into the EU of most of the central and east European states that had been members of the Warsaw Pact. The completion of these countries' paths to EU membership would of course not happen until 2004 and 2007 — in other words well beyond the end date of this volume. But it was within the period covered by the book that the course was largely set

and a far-reaching process was begun of dialogue with and assistance to the former Soviet bloc. The final part of this chapter will look at the European Commission's interaction with the Council of Europe. This gained new importance during the period under review because of the way in which the latter acquired a new and important role as the first European institution able to open its doors to the states emerging out of the former communist bloc. This new rationale gave an intensity and importance to the Council of Europe's contacts with the European Commission that had previously been lacking.

Chapter 21, by contrast, will focus primarily on the consequences of the Community/Union's

new-found dynamism in its relations with a series of partners of much longer standing. It will thus start with an analysis of the EC/EU's prominent role in the global-level pursuit of freer trade, first through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (and the Uruguay Round in particular), and subsequently through the establishment of the World Trade Organisation. The Commission had long been an important player in world trade talks, but the success of the single market project and the hopes and fears that this provoked among its Western partners made it an even more significant actor in the Uruguay Round than it had been in the Kennedy or Tokyo Rounds in the 1960s and 1970s. The second section turns its attention to the redefinition of the relationship between the EC/EU and its Mediterranean neighbours during the 1986-2000 period. Again this was not a new issue, but the success of the single market programme, plus the effects of Spanish and Portuguese membership and the wider transformation of European geopolitics, stimulated a real acceleration in the pace of change. Finally the chapter will turn to relations with the developing world. Here too the changes described owe partly to internal dynamics — in particular the need to negotiate a new Lomé Agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific nations — and partly to wider geopolitical and economic developments — whether the end of the Cold War or the debt crisis in the global South. A further stimulus to the development of closer ties between the EC/EU and Latin America was also provided by Spanish and Portuguese membership, given the strength of historical and commercial ties between the new Member States and South America.

In Chapter 22 the focus switches to relations with Canada, China, Japan, Russia and the United States — in other words the other big players in the international system — and a brief look at European policies relating to the Middle East. In all of these fields the European Commission was

keen both to intensify the European dimension of the relationship (as opposed to traditional bilateral links cultivated by each Member State) and to strengthen its own voice in the shaping of policy. Its success in doing so was somewhat mixed. As the chapter explains, the Commission's ties with China, with Japan and with the United States were all strengthened, in particular with the development of regular summit-level meetings. But the clear determination on the part of the Member States to maintain a firm steering hand on the EU foreign-policy tiller meant that the role of the Council presidency was as strong as, if not stronger than, that of the Commission in all of these encounters. One of the skills that all Commission external-relations representatives would have to learn during the 1990s was coexistence with the ever stronger Council presence in this field. The appointment of Javier Solana as the EU's High Representative in 1999 would represent the culmination of this trend.

Interaction with the ambitions of the Member States acting collectively through the Council structures also constitutes a central strand in the final chapter, which looks at the emergence of a European common foreign and security policy in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and then at the debate about, and first cautious move towards, an actual common defence policy during the latter part of the decade. In between, the sobering tale of the Commission's efforts to involve itself in the resolution of the bloody Yugoslav conflict highlights the very real obstacles that Europe in general, and the Commission in particular, faced when dealing with a foreign-policy challenge requiring military capabilities. The external dimension of the integration process undoubtedly grew considerably from 1986 to 2000, but the Commission's range of instruments and capabilities remained very lopsided, giving the institution real clout and importance in some fields, notably trade policy and discussions with prospective Member States,

but providing little leverage in situations where hard power was needed alongside soft-power instruments. Despite this asymmetry, however, the overall story told in the sections that follow is one of growing EU significance on the international stage and of increasingly diversified contacts with the outside world. The Commission was often an international actor obliged to act in tandem with

others, notably the Member States and the ever more powerful Council machinery, but its importance and international standing grew throughout the period between 1986 and 2000.

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