N. Piers Ludlow

Necessary but not automatic: how Europe learned to integrate

Book section

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N. Piers Ludlow

With over sixty years of history behind it, the process of regional integration in Europe has lasted longer, and gone further, than that seen in any other part of the world. The instinct therefore to look to the European example as a case-study of integration, from which other regions might derive both positive and negative lessons is both strong and comprehensible. But as this chapter will seek to emphasise, the European advance to regional integration has been the product of very specific historical circumstances. While there may therefore be some useful insights that can be gained from looking at the European process from the outside and seeking to identify some of the factors that have helped to drive it onward, any attempt to draw hard and fast lessons from the European story, or to assume any automatic parallels between the pattern of development observed and that likely to occur elsewhere, would be unwise. Europe has taken a very distinctive European road to that level of unity that it has so far obtained; other regions, to the extent that they too want and need to develop patterns of cooperation, are always likely to follow somewhat different paths. The bulk of this chapter will hence confine itself to trying to analyse what happened in Europe to create and sustain the EC/EU, before, very tentatively, suggesting a handful of conclusions that might be derived from this European process that could have some relevance elsewhere.

Two underlying imperatives

Europe has long been a densely populated but highly divided region, holding within it a multiplicity of states, nations, languages, cultures, ethnic and religious groups, and social classes. The potential for the inevitable rivalry and friction between and amongst these different groupings to break out into actual war has hence always been there. But whereas the 18th Century British historian, Edward Gibbon, could regard such periodic outbursts of violence as a healthy tonic and spur to development, a characteristic of Europe that helped keep its rulers alert and to prevent its populations from slipping into damaging torpor or complacency, the effects of war since Gibbon's

time have been rather harder to view in a positive light.[1] The destructiveness of the two great wars of the Twentieth Century in particular, was so great, whether measured in terms of those killed and wounded, the physical impact on the landscape of the continent, the political or economic disruption caused, or the damage done to Europe's standing in the world, that a need to avert future large-scale conflict has become almost self-evident. The first underlying imperative that encouraged many politicians and political thinkers to start contemplating some form of European unity has thus been the need to avoid war and to preserve peace within Europe, thereby avoiding the cataclysms that had marked the 1914 to 1945 period.[2]

Equally important has been a second underlying imperative, namely the extent of European interdependence in terms of what it ate, what it produced, and what it sold. Here too some of the basic realities have been obvious for centuries: Europe has been, ever since the Middle Ages if not earlier still, a region the prosperity of which has been built on extensive economic intercourse between different parts of the continent (and beyond). But such economic interaction has always been vulnerable not just to actual conflict, but also to the state-building processes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thus the historian Carl Strickwerda has written convincingly about the extraordinary level of interdependence, in capital, in labour, and in trade, that grew up in Europe's heavy industry in the latter part of the 19th century and the first part of the 20th, only for this interpenetration to be swept aside by the outbreak of the First World War.[3] Similarly, in a famous passage of his celebrated denunciation of the Versailles Treaty, John Maynard Keynes described the fashion in which the destruction of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its replacement with multiple, new and separate states, was likely to destroy patterns of economic interaction which had developed over the centuries and upon which much of the prosperity of the region relied.[4] The underlying realities of how Europe fed itself, how it produced its goods, and where it sold the output of its factories and workshops, thus led some thinkers and statesmen to the realisation that the political separation of the continent into largely

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[1] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (ed. H.R. Trevor-Roper) (London: Sadler & Brown, 1963)

[2] Derek Benjamin Heater, *The Idea of European Unity* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); Élisabeth Du Réau, *L'idée d'Europe au XXe siècle: des mythes aux réalités* (Paris: Éditions Complexe, 2008).

[3] Carl Strickwerda, 'The Troubled Origins of European Economic Integration: International Iron and Steel and Labor Migration in the Era of World War I', *American Historical Review* 98, no. 4 (October 1993): 1106–29.

[4] John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London: Macmillan, 1920).

autonomous sovereign entities, unwilling or unable to open themselves up fully to intra-European trade, came at a high economic cost. The solution once more would be to soften such divisions by establishing some type of over-arching European framework which would facilitate commerce between different parts of the continent.[5]

Importantly, however, the presence of such ideas did not lead automatically to the realisation of a united Europe. On the contrary, in interwar Europe in particular, those voices raised in favour of building Europe so as to preserve peace and to allow Europe's economic interdependence to be exploited, were all but drowned out by the more powerful calls in favour of national or imperial self-reliance. The imperatives for unity were present in the Europe of 1918 to 1939, in other words. But far from shaping the course of events, they were instead disregarded as the states of the European system tumbled into economic nationalism, autocracy, and ultimately war.

A favourable postwar context

It would thus take the particular circumstances of World War II and its immediate aftermath for the conditions to arise in which these long-present ideas of European cooperation and unity could move from the level of dreams to that of tentative and very partial realities. Exactly how this happened is the subject of intense and detailed scholarly debate, too varied and rich wholly to capture here.[6] But it is perhaps possible to identify a number of factors that helped bring this about.

One element is almost certainly the discrediting of the virulent nationalisms that had helped speed the descent into war. Contrary to some of the first, slightly simplistic accounts, this did not mean that the leaders of postwar Europe despaired of the nation state itself.[7] Rather the reverse in fact, as politicians across Britain and the continent pinned many of their hopes for postwar reconstruction, on the use of state power to plot the course of their recovery, to dampen the social tensions that had helped undermine democracy, and to rebuild a role for themselves in the recast international system.[8] In this they enjoyed widespread popular support. But such faith in state power did not wholly blind many amongst Europe's postwar political elite, or its wider population, to the realisation that individual states, acting in isolation, had

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[5] Éric Bussière, 'Premiers schémas européens et économie internationale durant l'entre-deux-guerres', *Relations internationales* n° 123, no. 3 (1 September 2005): 51–68.
[6] Wolfram Kaiser and Antonio Varsori, eds., *European Union History: Themes and Debates* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
[7] Walter Lipgens, *Die Anfänge der europäischen Einigungspolitik: 1945-1950* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1977).
[8] Alan S. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (Routledge, 2000).

neither been able to avert the Great Depression nor halt the slide into World War II. The rebuilding of the individual nation states would thus have to be flanked with the construction of a new international order in which states would have to cooperate in order to preserve international prosperity and keep the peace. Such an order might be universal and global – hence the hopes vested in the new structures of the United Nations Organisation. But especially with the ever greater divide opening up between the Communist East and the capitalist West, a divide which significantly lowered the effectiveness of global and UN cooperation, it could also be regional and centred on the states of Western Europe. Whichever grouping was chosen, however, it was widely accepted that one of the root causes of the interwar crisis had been the failure of international cooperation, and it was therefore vital that such mistakes not be repeated in the post-1945 period also.

Equally important in creating the conditions in which ideas of integration could flourish was the presence of a powerful, even existential, outside threat to each of the countries of Europe in the shape of the Soviet Union. This danger was double headed, in as much as the presence of sizeable communist parties in many Western European states immediately after World War II, meant that the military threat from the Red Army was mirrored by the domestic threat of Communist electoral triumph. Both aspects of this menace however gave Europe an incentive to unite. Militarily an army the size of Moscow's could only be contained by multiple European states acting together (preferably with the US as well) rather than any single European power acting alone. Cooperation and alliance was hence vital. Furthermore Europe's strategic vulnerability made all of the states of Western Europe highly conscious that were they to resume their internecine squabbling as they had after the First World War they were all too likely to find themselves sharing the fate of the countries of Eastern Europe. Again structures would need to be built so as to prevent the type of fratricidal divisions that had beset Europe during the interwar period. The domestic threat meanwhile not only helped encourage Europe's non-Communist parties to come together to discuss their shared fears of far left, but also made many realise that the only truly effective way of neutralising the electoral appeal of Communism would be the delivery of a level of economic growth that would be hard for any individual country to sustain if acting entirely alone. Economic cooperation would thus be a necessary ingredient in any long term defeat of Communism's political challenge.

Another consequence of this outside threat was US enthusiasm for European unity. One of the most striking features of the early European integration story is the importance of US sponsorship, encouragement, sometimes even downright bullying, in favour of greater integration.[9] The very word itself, supposedly, was a US coinage, devised by a Marshall Planner who was told that his European audience did not like his repeated stress on European unity and hence reached for his thesaurus in order to find a word that meant the same thing as unity but sounded a little less frighteningly radical.[10] Not all of this American persuasion proved wholly effective. At times indeed US pressure for integration was counterproductive. But viewed with hindsight I think it can be argued fairly conclusively that this US backing was a necessary if not sufficient condition for getting the integration process off the ground. And this support only really made sense in a context where the US regarded European unity as a vital element in strengthening Europe in a context of increasingly polarised East-West relations and establishing a partner in the incipient Cold War.

The combination of Soviet and US power also helped bring home to European elites how much the continent's stock had fallen in world affairs. Those who ruled Europe in the early postwar decades had all grown up in a continent that regarded itself, with some justification, as being at the very centre of global affairs. The early postwar years were hence a rude awakening, as power shifted ever more clearly away from Europe and towards the two emerging Superpowers. The fact that this same period also saw the increasingly rapid dissolution of Europe's colonial empires further reinforced this acute sense of power loss. As a result many turned to European unity as a mechanism that might lessen, if not reverse, this precipitous slide towards marginalisation in world affairs.[11] Europe was used to mattering in world affairs and to being a subject, not an object of international diplomacy. To recapture some of the continent's lost centrality became a further reason for Europe's political elite to explore ideas of integration and unity.

The third crucial factor was the need of European countries to reposition themselves vis-à-vis one another after the devastating impact of World War II. This

[9] Geir Lundestad, *'Empire' by Integration: The United States and European Integration, 1945-1997* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[10] Michael Charlton, *The Price of Victory* (London: British Broadcasting Corp., 1985), 69.

[11] Josef Becker and Franz Knipping, *Power in Europe?: Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany in a Postwar World, 1945-1950* (Walter de Gruyter, 1986); Ennio Di Nolfo, *Power in Europe? II: Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy, and the Origins of the EEC, 1952-1957* (Walter de Gruyter, 1992).

was perhaps most obvious in the case of Italy and West Germany, both of whom perceived in integration, a means of rejoining the European family of nations after the disgrace of defeat and occupation. For both countries, membership as equals with the French in a newly established European Community, was a major step towards re-establishing respectability and throwing off their pariah status. In both countries the political elite also believed that Europeanism would prove an ideal towards which their younger citizens could aspire, without reawakening the nationalist demons that had previously led to disaster. And in both countries membership in a European entity would strengthen their tenuous hold on Western alignment.[12] In Germany's case, *Westbindung* as the policy became known, would guard against either a deal between the FRG's allies and the Soviet Union in which Germany would be reunited in return for permanent neutrality, or, perhaps more likely for Konrad Adenauer, Germany's first postwar Chancellor, a choice by some successive German government to strike a deal along these lines with Moscow. A Germany firmly anchored to the West would be far less vulnerable to either eventuality. For Italy meanwhile the danger lay within, in the form of the sizeable Communist and Socialist parties, both of which initially opposed any type of Western alignment. Joining a strong and developing European entity, solidly Western in its orientation, would minimise the dangers of the Italians electing a government able to call into question the Italian choice of April 1948 to look West rather than East in the postwar world. But France too was arguably using integration to position itself, trading in its rapidly diminishing credit as one of the 'victors' of World War II in return for a set of European institutional arrangements designed to prevent the German threat, in particular, from disrupting its recovery and undermining its international position.[13] During the interwar period France had tried confrontation with a defeated neighbour and found itself cast, by world opinion, into the role of vindictive villain – a reputation which it had further weakened its position once Hitler came to power. After World War II its initial attempt to adopt an even tougher punitive stance had collided head on with the very different policy of Britain and America, both of whom were intent on rebuilding a strong Germany. The emergence in 1949 of a potentially strong West German state was a stinging defeat for French postwar foreign policy. In

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[12] Clemens A Wurm, *Western Europe and Germany: The Beginnings of European Integration, 1945-1960* (Oxford; Washington, USA: Berg Publishers, 1995); Antonio Varsori, ed., *La politica estera italiana nel secondo dopoguerra (1953-1957)* (Milano: LED, 1993).

[13] Raymond Poidevin, *Robert Schuman: Homme d'état, 1886-1963* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1986).

such circumstances integration offered a clever way of changing course, attracting praise from the US in particular for their new constructive stance, and gambling on partnership and reconciliation with the Federal Republic rather than a renewed confrontation that France was always likely to lose. France alone couldn't beat Germany; better then to join it.[14]

Such geo-political arguments in favour of unity were flanked with powerful economic motives. As argued above, the basic economic interdependence of European economies was nothing new, although the amputation of the eastern third of Germany did mean that the new West German state was deprived of the agricultural heartlands from which it had previously fed itself. This offered a valuable opportunity for major European exporters of agricultural goods like France and the Netherlands to take on the role once filled by Prussia.[15] But the more fundamental change was the way in which, with the ever greater involvement of the state in the running of most European economies – a trend which had been encouraged by both World Wars but which continued into the postwar world as states embraced economic planning, nationalisation, and extensive state welfare - that awareness of European interdependence which had once been preserve of the private sector now became a reality of central concern to the state itself. As a result, there was no repeat of the pre-World War I situation in which the interdependence and interlinkages perceived by private sector industrialists were disregarded or deplored by politicians intent on national aggrandizement. Instead the state now needed to act in ways that could address Europe's underlying need for economic cooperation. It was thus no coincidence that the single most identifiable clarion call for European action of the early postwar years came from that part of the French state in charge of planning the rebuilding of France, the *Commissariat du Plan*.[16] As Milward observes, the scheme by Jean Monnet that led to unveiling of the Schuman Plan in May 1950, was none other than a device intended to salvage the Monnet Plan – i.e. the roadmap to French economic recovery drawn up by the head of the planning commissariat – and to prevent the programmed reconstruction of French heavy industry being disrupted if not destroyed by the reappearance of competition from German heavy industry.

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[14] See also William I Hitchcock, *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe, 1944-1954* (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).
[15] Gilbert Noël, *France, Allemagne et 'Europe Verte'*, Euroclio (Berne: Peter Lang, 1995).
[16] François Duchêne, *Jean Monnet: The First Statesman of Interdependence* (New York: Norton, 1994).

Under the Schuman Plan European controls would take the place of the fast-disappearing Occupying Powers' controls on Germany industry and help prevent a free for all in the heavy industrial sector out of which Germany was always likely to emerge triumphant. One Monnet plan was thus intended to save the other.[17]

Finally it was necessary to devise a successful plan for integration. Numerous different schemes and ideas were put forward in the first postwar decade, many of which failed to get off the drawing board, others of which never lived up to the high expectations that had surrounded their launch. The ones that mattered though were those that managed to bring together a winning combination of purpose, timing, structure, and membership. The Schuman Plan thus focused on an important sector characterised by both a longstanding rivalry between French and German industry, but also a short term crisis brought about by the imminent ending of allied controls on German production.[18] It was launched at a time when the German government was weak enough still to be interested, and the French government strong enough to act, but already highly conscious of its dwindling leverage over its eastern neighbour. The proposed institutions were powerful enough to do the job they were intended for (controlling heavy industry) and exciting enough to look like a real advance towards European unity, but limited in their scope and hence not unduly threatening to the core of national sovereignty. And its membership was large enough to matter, but small enough for agreement to be feasible. Crucially four countries joined France and Germany in establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), rendering their tense enforced cohabitation that much more tolerable, and giving some credibility to the rhetoric about 'uniting Europe', but the British did not take part, thereby cutting out of the picture a strong sceptic about the integration process with an established track record of watering down integration schemes. The Six – France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg – were almost the ideal grouping within which to launch a scheme of this nature.

In similar fashion the planned EEC had a central purpose, the liberalisation of European trade, useful enough and attractive enough to appeal to important constituencies within each of the participating states.[19] But its structures also had enough development potential within them to attract to the cause those who wanted a

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[17] Alan S Milward, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe: 1945 - 1951* (London: Methuen, 1984).
[18] Klaus Schwabe, ed., *Die Anfänge des Schuman-Plans, 1950/51: Beiträge des Kolloquiums in Aachen, 28.-30. Mai 1986* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1988).
[19] Enrico Serra, ed., *Il rilancio dell'Europa e i trattati di Roma* (Bruxelles: Bruylant, 1989).

more political Europe and who had been downhearted by the 1954 failure of the putative European Defence Community (EDC). The timing was also good, with the French government which had overseen the fall of the EDC no longer in office, but with the pro-European momentum that had built up behind the planned European army not having entirely dissipated. The institutions shared plenty of DNA with those of the ECSC, but had had their supranationality substantially lessened, thereby reassuring some of those who had been concerned about the loss of sovereignty involved in the EDC. And the membership was once again the winning formula of the Six. The exclusion of Britain which had been a real problem in an institution with a military purpose like the EDC, not least because of the likelihood of Germany quickly becoming the dominant military player, mattered much less in a more economic entity like the EEC, and was certainly likely to make agreement about the institutional shape of the new Community that much easier.

Enduring utility

How though have institutions created over six decades ago been able to preserve their relevance over the ensuing years? After all the exceptional circumstances that facilitated their birth – Germany's temporary weakness and division, the Cold War, the internal left-wing threat within several European democracies, the vivid and still fresh legacy of World War II - have long since vanished. Why then, have the European bodies that emerged in the immediate postwar period not vanished also? This is all the more so given the multiple other ways in which Europe and the European Community/Union has evolved and developed over the sixty plus years in which it has been in existence. There are many factors likely to have been responsible for the longevity and success of the EC/EU, but this overview will highlight the three most important: value, adaptability and openness.

The first key reason why the EC/EU has gone on being relevant is the enduring value of its core activity, namely the establishment and maintenance of trade liberalisation within Europe. This task has had the huge merit of being attractive to governments and companies alike, almost attainable, but also never complete. The initial dismantlement of tariff barriers amongst the EC founder members, a task successfully concluded by 1967, has thus had to be followed up by the negotiation and defence of the Community/Union's trade profile vis-à-vis third countries, by the policing of competition and other rules within the customs union, by the

establishment of specialised policies, like the CAP for those parts of the economy unable simply to liberalise in the fashion expected of most industry, and, since the mid-1980s in particular, by a determined effort to rid the Single Market of those various non-tariff barriers that had partially undone the trade liberalisation efforts of the formative decades. It has also had powerful knock-on effects on other policy areas. Both the renewed emphasis on the establishment of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the emergence of what has become the Justice and Home Affairs pillar of the Union's activity, were closely linked to the mid-1980s drive to abolish the remaining barriers within a European Single Market.[20] The core goal aspired to – a target that is often approached, but never quite attained – namely barrier free trade within a large and prosperous European market, is one that has continued to exercise a strong appeal, thereby helping to win the ongoing allegiance of the member states of EC/EU, to turn the Community/Union into an important player in international commercial discussions, and to exercise a powerful magnetic pull upon all of those states that have found themselves geographically close to, but just outside of the integrating Europe. The risks of cutting oneself off from this large market continue, moreover, to act as a powerful disincentive to any state disillusioned with the integration process to withdraw from the Community/Union – as the current debate about Brexit within the United Kingdom clearly illustrates. The enduring utility of the intra-European liberalisation process first sketched out by the Beyen Plan of the early 1950s, has thus continued to play a key role in making the Community/Union worthwhile belonging to and dangerous to leave over half a century later.

Equally important however has been the ability of the EC/EU to also adapt itself to other tasks, in addition to trade liberalisation. The Treaty of Rome, the founding document of the EEC, was remarkably short about the specifics of what the Community that it brought into being would do. Some policy areas, like the establishment of a Customs Union, were set out in some detail; others, like an agricultural policy, were sketched in much more cursory fashion; and still others, like environmental policy, which today loom quite large in the activities of the EU, were not mentioned at all. This did not matter, however, since the Treaty was what the French call a *traité cadre*, a framework treaty, which set up an institutional system

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[20] N. Piers Ludlow, 'From Deadlock to Dynamism: The European Community in the 1980s', in *The Origins and Evolution of the European Union*, ed. Desmond Dinan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

without necessarily prescribing exactly what such institutions would do. The exact nature of the Treaty's endpoint was never spelled out. The famous objective referred to in the preamble, 'an ever closer union of the peoples of Europe', is, if one thinks about it, as vague and as unspecific as it is potentially inspiring. This was quite deliberate. In the short term it allowed a broad coalition to rally behind the original EEC scheme, ranging from those who were merely interested in trade liberalisation and nothing more, to those who had little interest in commercial matters, but instead regarded the new document as a high road leading rapidly to a fully fledged European federation – not to mention many others with viewpoints somewhere between these two extremes. But it has been equally important in the longer term, since the flexibility of the basic framework has allowed it to serve any number of policy goals and tasks that were unimagined by the founders. Monetary integration, wealth redistribution from the richer regions of the EC/EU to the poorer, foreign policy coordination, joint discussion of immigration, the funding of scientific research, or the establishment of student mobility schemes like Erasmus – the list of policy areas that the EU is now involved with that were barely referred to in the founding treaties is so long as to almost defy enumeration. Rather than being a precise instrument, carefully calibrated to execute one precisely defined task – and hence liable to become redundant once that task was complete – the Community/Union is instead like a Swiss Army knife, a multi-purpose tool capable of being used for any number of policy operations, many of which had never been contemplated by those who drafted the initial treaty text.

Another facet of this adaptability/flexibility has been the way in which the institutional system has been able to evolve, often without formal treaty change, so as to adapt itself to changing realities. The core institutional shape sketched out by the Treaty of Rome, with its four key institutions, the Commission, the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament, and the European Court of Justice, and its basic method of establishing a corpus of European law, drawn up collaboratively by all of those taking part, but binding upon all of those who entered the system, have retained a degree of validity throughout the years since 1958. But alongside such constancy there has also been a huge amount of flux, whether in the manner in which these institutions operate, or even in the fundamental architecture of the system. The rise from the mid-1970s of the European Council, a body not foreseen in the original

treaties, but now arguably at the very core of the Union, is an obvious case in point.[21]
As a result, the Community/Union has been able to cope with a vast increase in the
number of policy areas that it deals with, a massive expansion in the quantity and
complexity of law-making and decision-taking that is required to carry out, and
prodigious rise in the number of participating member states. Had the basic
mechanisms been less flexible, such a degree of change, would most likely have
overwhelmed the system entirely. Instead it has been able to adapt, messily certainly,
and often slightly more slowly than it ought to have done, but in a fashion that has
allowed it not only to survive but more importantly to do almost incalculably more
than the small, six nation customs union originally established in 1958.

Third, the structures designed to cope with a relatively simple six member
state Community in the late 1950s, have had the merit of being open to the
membership of many more countries. Enlargement has never been easy. On the
contrary, on every occasion that an expansion of the EC/EU has been contemplated,
there have been many on the inside of the Community/Union who have regarded the
prospect with ill-disguised dismay, predicting dire economic, political and
institutional consequences. The idea of a trade off between 'deepening' and
'widening' – between the furthering of integration and the extension of the EC/EU to
include new member states – has become so well established in writing about the
European integration process as to become almost a cliché. And after each round of
expansion there have been many who have attributed all of the subsequent difficulties
encountered by the Community/Union to the negative consequences of undue
enlargement. Despite this, however, the EC/EU has gone on expanding, from six to
nine, from nine to ten and then twelve, from twelve to fifteen, from fifteen to twenty
five, and most recently from twenty five to twenty seven and twenty seven to twenty
eight. Widening has thus become as constant a feature of the integration process, as
deepening itself, with barely a year in the Community/Union's history identifiable
when it has not been an imminent prospect, or a recently achieved reality, or
sometimes indeed both at once. Nor, contrary to general belief, has this geographical
growth been as destructive as the Cassandras have predicted. Rather the reverse
indeed, with new member states often bringing new policy priorities and new
perspectives into the integration process, thereby encouraging rather than

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[21] Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol, 'Filling the EEC Leadership Vacuum? The Creation of the European
Council in 1974', *Cold War History* 10, no. 3 (August 2010): 315–39.

discouraging new initiatives. The growth of redistributive policies, such as the structural or cohesion funds, for example, is very clearly attributable to the first and second enlargements which brought into the Community fold a number of countries like Ireland, Greece, Spain and Portugal which were significantly poorer than most of the founder members and hence required sizeable resource transfers in order to be able to cope with closer economic integration. More fundamentally still the increase in size of the Community/Union has played a key role in ensuring that it remains attractive and appealing to those already inside of it, as well as relevant in international discussions in a world ever more obsessed with huge entities like China or India. Would Germany be content were it still confined to a small European Community of six member states? And would the idea that the EC/EU really represented 'Europe' as a whole be at all credible were its membership still restricted to the six Western European states that set it up? That the answers to both questions are so obvious is a strong illustration of how openness to new members has been a third crucial feature in preserving the vitality and relevance of the EC/EU in the six decades since its creation.

Outside applicability

Do any of these reflections have a wider applicability than Europe? Or to put it another way, are the factors outlined above to explain how Europe chose the path of integration and the reasons that it has opted to remain on this path ever since, of any relevance to other parts of the world that might be tempted to experiment with regional integration or cooperation? There are many reasons to be highly tentative in making any such suggestions, not least the deeply unsatisfactory nature of the parallels frequently drawn between the integration process in Europe and the establishment of earlier federal systems such as the United States. Few of these enlighten; many mislead. The specificities of any particular region and the challenges that it faces in establishing the structures for regional cooperation are always likely to exceed the clear resemblances with what has happened and is still happening within Europe. But for what they are worth, this chapter will very cautiously advance five ideas derived from the European experience that might be of some utility to other parts of the world as they too grapple with the challenges of regional integration.

The first would be to underline the lack of automaticity between the objective need for integration and its realisation. Interwar Europe needed to integrate as much

if not more than postwar Europe. And yet despite both the political and economic incentives to follow this course, not to mention the presence of multiple plans and schemes designed to encourage just such a development, no such integration occurred. Instead, Europe became more divided rather than less and ultimately descended into the destructive chaos of World War II. This might suggest that in other regions too, it will not be sufficient merely to discern a need to increase regional cooperation; instead, a huge degree of political will is required in order to overcome the very basic reluctance of all nation states to relinquish any portion of their sovereignty or national independence.

Second the European example would suggest that a multiplicity of different incentives to integrate is a strength rather than a weakness. In Europe at least there was no single reason why the integration process began. Instead different actors perceived different incentives at different times. But rather than being a problem, this was actually central to the success of the integration process. As argued above, it was the very breadth of the EEC's appeal, its ability to attract the hopes of very diverse groupings, seeking seemingly divergent outcomes, that helped not only get the project off the ground but has also helped sustain it ever since. Needless to say such underlying differences of opinion have periodically resulted in sharp internal disagreements. This in part explains why the history of European integration is so littered with crisis and dispute.[22] And yet it has in many ways been the sheer variety of hopes vested in the integration project that has helped keep it going and ensured that it still retains a relevance and a utility decades after its original inception.

Third, the competition between multiple institutional visions has also been an advantage rather than a disadvantage. One of the features of postwar Europe was the huge proliferation of competing cooperative schemes. Many rose and fell with great rapidity. Others lingered on, never quite fulfilling the hopes of those who had founded them, but with too much utility, or too much symbolic value, to be allowed to die.[23] And still others persisted in near complete obscurity, performing helpful even vital functional tasks, but in a manner known only to a tiny minority of sectoral

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[22] Ludger Kühnhardt, *Crises in European Integration: Challenge and Response, 1945-2005* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).
[23] The Council of Europe would be a good example of this phenomenon.

experts.[24] This dense institutional landscape was a help rather than a hindrance to the early integration process however. For a start, successive institutions could learn from the institutional features, both positive and negative, of earlier structures. The nascent EEC for instance quite consciously sought to avoid some of the weaknesses that had beset its predecessor, the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC). Second, the almost Darwinian competition between different structures helped ensure that only the most suitable flourished. And third the presence of other international bodies relieved the fledgling Community institutions from trying to do too much, too soon. Neither monetary cooperation nor foreign policy cooperation needed to be handled by the Community during its first decade of operation for instance, because the former was the preserve of the Bretton Woods institutions, the second that of NATO.[25]

Fourth the European example also suggests that there can be significant advantages in starting small in terms of membership. An EU of 27 does now operate reasonably effectively, despite the lamentations of those nostalgic for the smaller, sleaker, entity of 12 or 15. But a Community so large would have been unlikely to have got off the ground in the 1950s or 1960s. Far better instead to have begun with few member states – and few policy tasks – and to have learned to cope with both widening and deepening as time went on. The fledgling EEC thus benefited both from the reality of the Cold War that made membership inconceivable not just for the many states trapped behind the Iron Curtain but also for countries like Sweden, Finland or Austria that were neutrals in the East-West conflict, and from the initial choice Britain or Denmark to remain on the sidelines. It might well therefore be the case that elsewhere too, successful regional integration need not initially involve all of those states that might potentially be included. Instead starting small can help lessen the initial challenge and make success more realistic. Then, if the process works, others can join in at a later stage.

Fifth and finally, the recent difficulties of the EC/EU underline the importance of winning and preserving the support of the wider population for regional cooperation. The fragility of the EU's hold on popular consent could be seen as its

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[24] Like the many specialist bodies in the fields of transport, postal communications etc. See Kiran Klaus Patel, 'Provincialising European Union: Co-Operation and Integration in Europe in a Historical Perspective', *Contemporary European History* 22, no. 04 (2013): 649–73.
[25] N. Piers Ludlow, 'The End of Symbiosis: The Nixon Era and the Collapse of Comfortable Co-Existence between European and Atlantic Integration', in *Atlantic, Euratlantic, or Europe-America?*, ed. Giles Scott-Smith and Valérie Aubourg (Paris: Soleb, 2011).

greatest historical weakness. The gap between the European ideas of those who govern Europe and those who are governed has arisen for reasons that are fairly comprehensible. The structures of the Community/Union are both baffling and distant from the lives of most Europeans. There has also been a recurrent temptation for all national politicians, to claim for themselves credit for all the gains that integration has brought, while blaming the EC/EU for all the negative consequences of closer cooperation. And it is easier, and in the short term attractive, for politicians and to some extent the media to continue to talk to national populations about European politics in a way that emphasises national autonomy and freedom of manoeuvre, rather than fully acknowledging the extent to which all of the EC/EU member states are dependent on cooperation with each other. But whatever the reasons behind it, this failure fully to educate most Europeans about the realities of the integration process has already become an important check on the integration process – witness the periodic negative outcomes of referendums – and seems likely to cause future difficulties ahead. It is therefore an error that any other regional cooperative project would be well advised to learn from and avoid.

Quite how applicable any of these insights are to other regions of the world, and more specifically to Africa, is a judgment I feel little qualified to make. What is worth stressing by way of conclusion is the way in which European integration reflects a series of underlying realities about the continent, but was only able to begin thanks to a particular set of circumstances that arose in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Crucial amongst these was the discrediting of extreme nationalism, the presence of a serious outside threat, the need for several European countries to rehabilitate and reposition themselves after the trauma of wartime defeat and occupation, and the greater governmental awareness of economic interdependence that arose out of increased state involvement in national economies. Once started, the integration process has then been sustained by the continuing relevance and value of its core liberalising task, the flexibility of its policy remit and its institutional structure which have been able to adapt to shifting reality and take on a vast array of policy tasks never dreamt of by its founders, and its openness to membership applications from a huge number of neighbouring states. A process that began with limited cooperation amongst just six countries in the production and distribution of coal and steel, has thus evolved into the hugely complicated and complex structure of today's

EU. This certainly matters for Europe; whether it matters also for other regions, and has any lessons to teach, is an issue I shall leave to others to determine.