

Étude

**The Nature of the Beast:
the past and future purpose
of European integration**

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I. – Introduction

The aim of this paper is meant to evaluate the state of European integration at the current time. It seeks to offer provocative thoughts on the status quo and some ideas about future strategies, exemplified in the idea of a European space strategy (ESS). In turn, the paper analyses the sensibility and the possibility of such a strategy and points to the potential of it for the future European integration process.

This paper combines the analysis of the driving ideals of the early European integration process with their realist purpose in the Europe of the 1950s. Building on this it will also suggest one concrete policy for the future which could give the European integration process new direction and purpose. The first part (II) seeks to name the ideals on which the early European integration process was founded, i.e. peace and prosperity. This section will follow the early idealist discourse, but with reference to very concrete integration efforts, such as the Schuman Plan¹. The second part (III) outlines the comparison between the nation state

1. For the idealist perspective, see W. Lipgens, *Die Anfänge der europäischen Einigungspolitik 1945-1950*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1982, for more concrete applications mainly in a federalist context see J. Monnet, *Mémoires*, Fayard, Paris, 1976, and Robert Schuman, 'Pour l'Europe', in: René Lejeune, *Robert Schuman Père de l'Europe*, Fayard, Paris, 2000.

and national institutions, on the one hand, and European institutions and European integration, on the other hand. It argues that instead of this classical comparison, European integration was something new and that it has a different function to fulfil than the nation state, i.e. an idealistic leadership function. In the third part (IV) I argue that recent criticism on the European integration process is founded in its own success; that is, the early integration ideals of peace and prosperity have been fulfilled in their pioneering function. Therefore, they can no longer act as a driving force for the European integration process². The fourth part (V) will then suggest one concrete policy which might become an idealistic driving force for the European integration process in the future, i.e. a European space strategy.

II. – Early European ideals

The foundation period of the European integration process in the 1950s is marked by two strong physical threats. First, the past still had a huge impact on the politics of the time in the form of the physical and psychological repercussions of World War II. Second, the Cold War acted as an ever present threat to the survival of every European nation, if not the world. The yearning for peace becomes very understandable before this background. All the post war institutions have, therefore, the preservation of peace at the core of their agenda. Early European integration initiatives such as the Schuman Plan are no exception to this as the introductory phrase to the Schuman declaration of 9 May, 1950 show:

“World peace can only be safeguarded if constructive efforts are made proportionate to the dangers which threaten it. The contribution which an organised and active Europe can bring to civilisation is indispensable to the maintenance of peaceful relations. France, by advocating for more than twenty years the idea of a united Europe, has always regarded it as an essential objective to serve the purpose of peace. Because a united Europe was not achieved, we had war³.”

The Schuman Plan, which resulted in the first European Community, i.e. the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), is the best example

2. For an analysis of the early European integration process, as dealt with under part III and IV of this paper essay, see (author, 2005).

3. A. G. Harryvan, J. van der Harst (eds.) *Documents on the European Union*, Macmillan Press, London, 1997, p. 61.

in its primary objective to bind French and German war-important industries together under the 'High Authority'.

“By pooling basic production and by creating a new high authority whose decisions will be binding on France, Germany and the other countries that may subsequently join, these proposals will lay the first concrete foundation for a European federation which is so indispensable to the preservation of peace⁴.”

A war between the two age old enemies would therefore become 'materially' impossible.

The second most concrete objective for early European integration was the rebuilding of the economy. The background of this can again be found in the repercussions of World War II. Allowing for national differences such as the degree of war damage, all of Western Europe had economic problems which stretched from desperate attempts to feed the people in the immediate post war years to alleviating hardship later on. The attempt of turning the war-stricken countries into prospering economies was therefore another key objective. Peace and Prosperity can, thus, be seen as the guiding principles of early European integration.

III. – The shape and the function of European integration

As soon as the idea of a united Europe was born the question about the final destination of this integration-unification effort arose. Throughout the whole integration process there have been ideas that the final stage of integration would be something similar to the existing nation states, which is probably why the shortcomings of European institutions are often criticized in comparison to the functions, capabilities and powers of national institutions, such as the parliament, for example.

Federalism came to be seen as one possible solution for organising Europe in a stately manner and one solution one had some experience with. In Britain it became the dreaded word for a European super-state. Most continental European states saw it as a possibility for the future, undoubtedly fostered by their own internal federal structures as in the French and the German case.

4. A. G. Harryvan, J. van der Harst (eds.), *Documents on the European Union*, p. 62

However, at the beginning of the integration process in the 1950s not even the most fervent Euro-enthusiasts saw European federation become a reality in the near future, as this quotation by Maurice Schuman⁵ shows:

“Federation would be compatible neither with our particular situation nor with the common [European] interests: Federation is characterised by the existence of an agency superior to the States which are placed under its authority, and which takes over part of their internal sovereignty, while wielding exclusively the exercise of external sovereignty⁶.”

Schumann carried on by putting forward an alternative. In his eyes European integration and the European institutional structure were something new. The fact that no one yet knew how it would work did not mean that it would not work; it was indeed the hallmark of the new. Rather than trying to find easy answers in old concepts, such as federalism, one had to work hard on new solutions for present problems. The results in common European political structures would result from that.⁷ Before this time one realisation was that limited and specialised integration seemed to work, e.g. the ECSC. Such communities had their own institutions and could work as independent entities. The conclusion was to use this model as a blueprint for other limited integration efforts such as the EDC and put an overarching political authority in place only when those limited communities added up to a European whole⁸.

One comparison can, however, be drawn between the existing structures of the nation states and the developing institutions of the European Communities. The historic function of the nation state has been

5. Member of the ‘Mouvement républicain Populaire’ (MRP) which was the centre conservative party in the Fourth French Republic, Schuman was State Secretary, i.e. Junior Minister, in the Foreign office under Robert Schuman and became one of the main drivers of European integration efforts in the French administration. He politically survived the upheaval of the return of de Gaulle to power and the changeover to the Fifth Republic, despite the fact that most of the traditional conservative votes were sucked into the Gaullist following.

6. Maurice Schumann (MRP), State Secretary in the Foreign Office, in JO, 2ème Lég., 20/11/53, p. 5361II, original: « Une fédération ne serait pas, elle non plus, compatible ni avec notre situation particulière, ni avec les intérêts communs. La fédération se caractérise en effet par l’existence d’un organisme supérieur aux États placés sous son autorité, et qui, tout en absorbant une partie de leur souveraineté intérieure, se réserve, à titre exclusif, l’exercice de leur souveraineté extérieure. »

7. Maurice Schumann (MRP), State Secretary in the Foreign Office, in JO, 2ème Lég., 20/11/53, p. 5361II-II

8. Monteil (MRP), in JO, 2ème Lég., 11/2/52, p. 585II, see also, René Mayer (RRS), in JO, 2ème Lég., 19/11/53, p. 5307II

to bind the population of a given territory together, to found a common identity on the basis of mostly fairly vague values of common historic experience, language and ethnicity. Another function was to create loyalties towards its leadership seen as the representation of the state, the nation and ultimately the people. In its essence it was an inward looking creation process which formed an entity of people and territory which has defined our political realities for at least the past 400 years⁹. On the basis of this inner strength the modern nation states could embark on amazing ventures of exploration and civilization – sometimes not seen so positively nowadays – and on wars with a destructive potential not yet seen.

The European integration process, by contrast, never had the objective of forming internal unity. Admittedly, there have been initiatives of creating a European identity in a common citizenship and Western Europe came also to be seen as some entity in the Cold War scenario. However, compared particularly to the binding forces of the nationalist movements the cohesive forces of a European identity remained relatively weak. As I have pointed out above, the leading ideals of European integration are not to be found in this field, but rather in the external function of leading the way towards peace and prosperity. Therefore, the leadership function towards the most important needs of the post war period – peace and prosperity – became the ideals which came to guide and drive the European integration process. The idealistic leadership function must thus be seen as more important than establishment of a political, ethnic or territorial entity, which has been shown to be a defining factor of the nation state.

IV. – The problems of the EU

Over the past sixty years, due to a variety of reasons there have been periods of faster and slower European integration. Dominant personalities such as Robert Schuman or Charles de Gaulle, to name but the usual positive and negative examples in each category, play a role. Political events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification – closely linked to the Maastricht treaty and the step from the European Community to the European Union – are evidently of similar importance.

9. I refer to the creation of the French nation state under Louis XIV, which is often seen as the divide between the aristocratic system and the more idealistic system of creating loyalties towards the nation.

Or questions of general political outlook, as can be found in the deepening versus widening argument, can also be mustered as an example.

Similarly, there has always been the complaint – mainly by European enthusiasts – that European integration was not progressing fast enough. At the latest since the last European quantum jump of the Maastricht there has been a chorus of Euro-sceptics complaints about the insufficiencies of the Union and the integration process¹⁰. This in itself might not be so significant, because such crossfire has been a fact of life of European integration ever since it was born.

Nevertheless, I would like to add one reason which to me seems to explain some of the very fundamental criticisms on European integration in recent times, i.e. that the idealistic basis of the European integration project has in a sense been eroded by its own success. The ideals of peace and prosperity which defined the direction of European integration have been fulfilled. Now, this is of course not true one might argue. The conflicts in former Yugoslavia and the raging poverty in some Eastern European countries are only the most obvious reminder of the lingering threat against the material as well as the physical existence of people in Europe. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that such cases are no comparison to the Europe of the immediate post-war period. In addition, within the EU such threats have been virtually extinct. Furthermore, the EU is working actively against such economic and military threats in the neighbouring Eastern European countries. Examples of such EU policies include the economic development programmes as well as the recent take over of the leadership by the EU over the SFOR forces in former Yugoslavia.

Therefore, the pioneering ideals of the European integration process – peace and prosperity – have been fulfilled to the extent that they can actually act as leading ideals to pull the integration process forward. They do not drive governments or people – not in the 15 Member States of the EU as it was known before May 2004. Peace and prosperity are taken for granted within these fifteen Member States. Perhaps with some precaution and slight exceptions these ideas might still have the same ‘pull’ in the ten new member states in Central and Eastern Europe?

10. Because of the as of yet uncertain outcome of the ratification process, the European Constitution is beyond the scope of this paper.

V. – New ideals

Based on this realisation I would argue that the European integration process is looking for a direction, perhaps even for new ideals. I would also argue for the preservation of the spirit of early European integration in that the founding fathers picked the most pressing needs and the biggest ideals available and turned them into a distant and difficult, but still achievable vision of Europe's future. In their own states they translated these far-fetched ideals into concrete policies which aligned the European nations for the purpose of arriving at these visionary objectives some day.

The early ideals of peace and prosperity have been fulfilled. From my perspective it is no good to stay put and administer the achievements of the past, not least, because this has never been the nature of European integration and would betray the internal dynamism which has carried Europe where it is, today.

On the basis of this reasoning I want to suggest only one constructive and outreaching objective, which illustrates the potential of new aims for the European integration process in the sense that it might give new direction and new impetus to the European integration process, i.e. a European space strategy.

It is the still vague idea that we might be reaching a threshold of a seemingly insurmountable barrier of space which we can either shrink back from or which we can work towards overstepping. Institutionally, such a venture clearly means a much more prominent role for the European Space Agency (ESA). Following Jean Monnet in his conviction that no daring project can succeed under unanimity rule¹¹, it seems advisable to bring ESA fully within the supranational treaty framework of the EU with qualified majority voting applied just like for all legislative initiatives concerning the Common Market.

Beyond the institutional arrangements there will clearly be a question over the budget. If ESA is meant to take up a leadership role, the only reasonable way of achieving this is an increase in their spending capacity. A gradual increase on the basis of positive experience has worked best in past European integration arrangements. However, these are relatively self-evident remarks, world apart from the administrative realities of Brussels or, in this case, the ESA headquarters in Paris. Therefore, I do

11. Jean Monnet, *Mémoires*, Fayard, Paris, 1976, p. 333, 413

not want to linger with considerations which will have to be settled while the European space strategy evolves.

VI. – Conclusion

In conclusion a European space strategy might fit well with the dynamism of the European integration effort and give it an additional push, fulfilling its classical leadership function. The sensibility and the possibility of the development of such a European Space Strategy shall be the topic of another paper.

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