

Post-war European Integration: How We Got Here

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BEN BRADLEY, FEB 15 2012

Europe in the period after 1945 has seen a clear, if gradual, shift towards cooperation over conflict. At this time, in the wake of the Second World War, nations lay in tatters and the continent was soon to be divided completely in half with spheres of US and Soviet influence. Beginning with those nations to the west of the 'Iron Curtain', a new environment emerged in which leaders vowed never to allow such widespread devastation as occurred in the two 'Great Wars'. From that point a burgeoning sense of commitment to each other has evolved; from 'The Six' initial delegates into an organisation with a vast remit for control of mainly economic but ever increasingly social and defence policies throughout its membership of 27 states. In the modern day the European Union is a world leader in terms of supra-national governance and integration (Kegley Jr. '09, p177); with its single market and multilateral currency and with a growing sense of the prospects of the entire group being intertwined. It is a model for other inter-governmental organisations in the East and South America (ASEAN, USAN etc.).

In Europe post 1945 there remained a tension between the traditionally opposing Allied and Axis powers as well as the new issue of Russian dominance in the East. The Red Army had marched in to Berlin, which was now divided in to four spheres of influence; US, British, French and Soviet. The nations of Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia and East Germany amongst others had all fallen beyond the control of the Western Powers and the continent was more divided than ever. The idea of the all-powerful nation state had been discredited and the key players of the mainland; namely France and Germany, were keen to build closer relations (Pinder 1998, p3). For France this was as much to limit the power of the German state as for advancement of their own. The idea of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was devised by Jean Monnet as a starting point; a lowest common denominator for these two nations to agree, with the aim of expanding cooperation at a later time (Ross 2009, p479). Six nations agreed to join this community (France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries) and from that seed has emerged over half a century of ever expanding central governance in Europe. This essay will seek to identify the key reasons for this shift from conflict to international cooperation in the period post-1945, and explain the reasons for their occurrence and the motives of the key actors.

One of the key factors in the changing attitudes of powerful actors after World War Two was the sheer devastation and loss caused by the conflict. Overall 60 million people had died worldwide, including 37 million civilians and 6 million Jews. This was loss unequalled even by the First World War and it led the key players in Europe to question the methods of peacemakers at Versailles as well as the traditional power of the 'nation-state' itself. Versailles, and more specifically the reparations and 'War Guilt Clause', had almost certainly played a part in Hitler's rise to power and the burning resentment within the German state. It would certainly not have been wise to have ignored this lesson and again sought to punish the aggressors. Nationalism and the "*Fascist glorification of the nation-state*" was a stark lesson on the problems caused by a lack of coordination between European governments and many discussed the possibility of Federalist system and close cooperation (Pinder 1998, p4).

The French still had reservations about rebuilding Germany and integration was viewed by some as a way of taking some control of German policy. If they could make Germany commit to supra-national control and inter-governmental cooperation whilst she was in a weakened state then future governments would struggle to withdraw from these arrangements later on. Jean Monnet picked up on coal and steel as an initial area for cooperation, which would allow the French to disassemble the German war machine and exert an element of control over its resources. Joint control over these key manufacturing industries would make it nigh on impossible for one country to attack the other, given

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the difficulty of gaining the resources required and the massive hit it would take to its own economy. It was important for Europe as a whole that it developed multi-lateral security through cooperation and joint ventures, in order to avoid the type of 'security competition' that led to the problems and divisions in the build up to World War Two (Art 2007, p6) It could easily be argued that Monnet was himself a federalist, advocating strong powers for European government, but was intelligent enough to see that people would only accept the idea in small steps; it would never be possible to make an immediate switch to a 'United States of Europe' but he had much grander plans for the development of the ECSC (Burgess 1991, p27).

A second key factor is a decline in global influence. After World War Two those nations, especially Britain and France, that had been major world powers in the past began to realise that they no longer had sufficient influence in the world if operating alone. The growth of the USA and USSR, with their massive populations and geographical domination, had the economic and military power to completely engulf Europe in a 'Cold War' with pressure exerted from both sides. It became apparent that European governments could only hope to control the actions of these key players on European soil if they spoke together.

Whilst Britain was happier to downplay its European ties in favour of the Atlantic Alliance and Commonwealth, the French especially were worried that they no longer had the global influence or economic fire-power that once saw these two nations dominate the world with vast empires; it became clear that only a united Europe could carry any weight globally (Senior Nello 2009, p18). The USA was happy with any idea that prevented a continent-wide despair and an influx of Communism. It was, at least in part, the provision of Marshall Aid from 1947 that led to the creation of the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), with the job of deciding how the money was to be distributed (Weigall and Stirk 1992, p39). This was the first official union of the major European states and the start of an 'economic community' which has evolved into the modern European Union.

Even those states which rejected the mainstream development of economic union, through the ECSC, were not averse to the idea of cooperation. Britain, the Swiss, Austrians, Portuguese and Scandinavian nations rejected the Coal and Steel Community but instead formed a separate alliance, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). Cooperation was seen as the most effective method of economic development and the split between 'The Six' and the EFTA was over the style of its implementation, not its principles.

Thirdly the western European powers had to look outwards. As well as internal issues the European states also needed to protect themselves from the external threat of Soviet Russia and the impact of the Cold War. Europe was divided in half through Berlin and those countries to the west of the wall were determined to prevent a domino effect and the spread of Communist influence. The Treaty of Rome (1957) set up a European Economic Community; a unity of the same six nations of the ECSC but with even stronger links and broader cooperation. Article 2 of the treaty set out its key objectives, which included increased stability and steady expansion; a clear sign that those six nations were consciously defending themselves against the 'Evil Empire' and sought closer cooperation with other European states (Senior Nello 2009, p27). The uprising in Czechoslovakia in 1948 had been a real cause for concern, as was the development of Soviet nuclear arms. These Cold War security issues amongst many others evidenced the fact that 'The Six' had to work together and expand to find safety in numbers.

The European states were, to an extent, duty bound to act against the USSR because of the level of aid from the USA and the debts they owed. US troops were stationed in West Germany, which was seen to be the most vulnerable, but the neighbouring states were uncomfortable with the idea of German rearmament. The North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO) signed in 1949 was an attempt to protect Germany, and the rest of the European mainland, under a banner of unity and integration whilst avoiding the risk of a renewed German threat (Taylor 2007). It was also another example of integration in action, but on a larger scale. At the time NATO comprised 12 nations whilst Europe's union was only 6.

After the initial successes of the 1940s and 1950s the 'European Project' took off and even Britain, who were initially "of Europe but not 'in' Europe" (Churchill 1946) applied for membership in 1961 and 1967 (only to be vetoed by Charles de Gaulle). The fourth factor in the push for integration is the success of integration in itself. The rise in living standards targeted by the Rome Treaty made those nations, chiefly of the South and the Scandinavians, see

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the benefits of integration for their economies and this remained a key selling point right up to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989-1991 when the former Eastern Bloc states were equally keen to join the EC.

The idea of 'ever-closer union' gained momentum "...and its own prophets who exhibit zealous faith as to its destiny" (O'Neill 2009, p 4). Its usefulness and mutual benefits saw the idea of integration take deep root within many political elites and, despite a certain separation from the people at large, levels of cooperation continued to grow throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

In conclusion it is clear that after half a century of tension and conflict there was a real push for closer ties and cooperation within Europe after 1945. Whilst the East came under the shadow of the USSR and stagnated, practically every nation to the west of the Berlin Wall saw sense in the notion of a united European union as a means to economic growth and security; even if they didn't initially want a part in it themselves (as with Britain). It was important, especially for the French, that Germany be contained and controlled. The ECSC brought these two nations together with shared resources and has led to over 60 years of peaceful friendship. Second the former European powers had lost much of their global influence and fallen far behind the US and Soviet Union; the only way for them to have a significant voice on an international stage was by joining together to work for mutual gain. Third was the external security concern of Communism, which was combated through the NATO alliance and defensive cooperation. Finally, all of these factors in unison lead to a rise in living standards and levels of security that Europe had not experienced for centuries. The success of the integration project was its own catalyst for 'ever-closer union' and the growth of the Community.

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