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Introduction

This book is a revised and updated edition of an earlier work, *Surpassing Realism: The Politics of European Integration since 1945*, which was published by Rowman & Littlefield in 2003. Like its predecessor, this book is a narrative history that inserts the story of European integration into the wider history of this period. Imperial decline and decolonization; the threat and then fall of communism; the impact of American foreign, fiscal, and monetary policy; and the democratization of the Mediterranean countries and the nations of central Europe are just some of the contemporaneous historical developments whose stories intersected with the history of European integration and have been woven into this book's fabric.

What is meant by European integration? We mean the historical process whereby European nation-states have been willing to transfer, or more usually pool, their sovereign powers in a collective enterprise. The European Union (EU), which today counts twenty-seven member states, nearly 500 million inhabitants, an economy larger than that of the United States (U.S.), and a complex institutional structure that includes a supranational central administration (the European Commission), an elected Parliament, a Court of Justice, and a Central Bank, is the outcome of this process.

When one thinks of the economic, political, and moral abyss into which Europe fell in the 1930s and 1940s, the emergence of such an organization can seem like a miracle. Indeed, some partisans of European integration have the unfortunate habit of squashing criticism of the EU's current policies or institutions by evoking the specter of a return to Europe's totalitarian past if the EU is criticized. Despite such overzealousness, building the EU is an important achievement, of which three generations of European politicians have a right to be proud.

There have, of course, been many efforts to find a root cause for the development of supranational institutions in Europe. The desire to supersede ruinous nationalism and ensure peace; the original member states' need to provide economic welfare and geopolitical security; the need of European states, prodded by domestic lobbies, to adapt to changes in the global economy; the influence of liberal economic theory on political elites; the intended and unintended consequences of experiments in supranationalism; and the lingering conviction of the original member states that they could better maximize their relative power (i.e., the extent to which they counted in the world) by uniting are six more or less plausible overarching hypotheses. Other hypotheses might be added, but not by this book, which has no pretensions to do anything more than tell a very complex story clearly and concisely.

The one broad observation that this book does advance about European integration is that it could not have occurred had West European states not grasped after 1945 that they had to abandon the “autistic power politics” that had dominated their relations hitherto. In other words, West European states, finding themselves in a world dominated by the rival superpowers and longing to rebuild their devastated economies, realized that they could no longer pursue their own short-term interests with scant regard for the consequences of their actions on their neighbors.¹ In an age of nuclear weapons, moreover, war could no longer be regarded as an extension of foreign policy. The aura of moral approbation that has always surrounded the process of European integration, in both the public rhetoric of statesmen and specialist texts in international relations theory, has ultimately derived from this renunciation of *realpolitik*. Turning their backs on power politics, however, did not mean that nation-states in Europe suddenly became paragons of altruism. They remained protective of their economic, commercial, and political interests and invariably battled hard within the confines of the European Community to secure their goals. Toward the rest of the world, notably over agricultural trade, Europe has also regularly showed that it puts its own interests first, irrespective of the consequences for its principal partners and allies.²

With hindsight, the most striking fact about the history of European integration is the tenacity with which the member states have defended their formal sovereign rights. The number of member states increased from the six original nations to nine in 1973, to ten in 1981, to twelve in 1986, to fifteen in 1995, to twenty-five in 2004, to the current twenty-seven in 2007, and the sheer number of policies decided at European level multiplied even more dramatically, but the essence of the Community’s decision-making procedure has remained the same since the 1950s: major new policy departures are almost never made unless the member states have reached collective agreement. Only rarely does a “qualified majority” of member states compel their peers to accept a proposal against their will in the EU’s key legislature, the Council of Ministers. This is especially true when the member states negotiate amendments and additions to the treaties that are the EU’s *de facto* “constitution.” Such changes must be agreed upon unanimously.

This is not to deny that Community policy possesses an important supranational dimension. It does. The European Commission, a committee of senior officials nominated by the member states, formulates, after consultation with the member states’ permanent representatives at Brussels, all proposals for new legislation and also keeps nominal vigil over the member states’ implementation of European law. Since the 1992 Treaty on European Union, moreover, the power of the elected European Parliament to ratify and shape the decisions reached by the member states has significantly increased. The sentences of the European Court of Justice have established the supremacy of European law over national law, and the Court provides for judicial review of an overzealous Commission’s actions, or, more usually, of member states too indolent in implementing Community law.

Nevertheless, the institutions and procedures of the European Union could not work for a week in the absence of the will to cooperate of the member states, especially the largest ones—Germany and France above all, but also Britain, Italy, Spain, and, since 2004, Poland. This

salient fact, which is obvious, but which it is not always fashionable to stress, means that the limit of European integration can be identified with some ease: it is that frontier beyond which lie the policy areas over which the member states of the Union are not prepared to relinquish sovereign power or, put more simply, do not wish the neighbors to intrude upon.

There are good reasons to believe that the process of European integration is bumping at this frontier. Public opinion in nations such as the Netherlands, Germany, and France—countries historically in favor of pooling sovereignty or delegating more powers to central European institutions—seems unwilling to countenance significant further steps in the direction of greater integration. Certainly, it is not favorable to rapid enlargement of the Union in the Balkans and Eastern Europe (Norway or Switzerland, by contrast, would be greeted with open arms).

Since the turn of the century, moreover, some of the EU's most high-profile projects—the Lisbon program to make the EU the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010, the would-be EU Constitution rejected by French and Dutch voters in 2005, the idea of a common EU foreign policy, the Euro itself—have met with mixed success or even outright failure. All four projects were hailed as giant steps toward building Europe, but in every case, member states, or their peoples, pulled back from the implications of “more Europe.” Member states, especially but not only in the Mediterranean, have been reluctant to introduce the liberalization of services foreseen by the Lisbon plan; the prospect of freer movement of peoples from Central to Western Europe was one of the main reasons why the Constitution failed, and the strict rules imposing fiscal discipline on members of the Euro-zone were evaded (in the case of Greece fraudulently) by some member states since they would have required too much fiscal pain to implement.

Supporters of European integration often say, echoing the words of the first president of the European Commission, the German diplomat Walter Hallstein, that European integration is like riding a bicycle: if you stop, you topple over. But it is also true, to develop the simile, that few cyclists have the muscles or the will to ascend the highest mountains and are quite content to spin along the foothills without breaking sweat. Since the introduction of the Euro, the EU has launched itself at some stiff climbs: in every case, several countries' legs have buckled and the pack of riders has had to freewheel back downhill.

In other words, the aura of success that has enveloped the process of European integration for most (though not all) of the period since the 1950s is dissipating. If it disappears, there will be repercussions for the way in which the story of European integration is told. The process of European integration is no more immune from revision than any other historical process.³ The years since 2003 have revealed long-standing structural flaws in the so-called European construction and a straightforward narrative of success, which *Surpassing Realism* on the whole was, today looks difficult to justify. A history of the European Union, to be plausible, is one which, as well as capturing the authentic novelty of the process of integration and the indisputable idealism that it has engendered, also looks back from the EU's present and traces the causes of the current malaise—for malaise there is.

The book is structured chronologically. Chapter 2 deals with the five-year period between the war's end in May 1945 and May 1950, when French foreign minister Robert Schuman

proposed establishing an economic community for coal and steel products. Why 1945? Why neglect the many intellectuals and statesmen who proselytized for European unity between the wars? The answer to this valid question is that ideas for European unity have been around for centuries, but the will to realize them emerged only after the catastrophe of the Great Depression, fascism, and world war. Had Europe not been laid so low, both morally and economically, by fascism, the ideal of European unification would not have seemed a practical venture to the primarily Christian Democrat leaders of Western Europe.

The third chapter deals with events from 1950 to 1958. These were the years in which the Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) treaty was negotiated by six West European states (Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and West Germany), and the Community began its work; they were also years of great tension in the Cold War in which the United States tried and failed to involve these same countries in a defense community working in harmony with NATO. By March 1957, however, “The Six” had nevertheless negotiated a treaty to promote cooperation in the field of nuclear energy and research, and—crucially—to establish a European Economic Community (EEC), which was a customs union for industrial and agricultural products. The negotiation of the EEC was a hard-fought battle and many, notably the British government, underestimated the will of The Six to make the necessary compromises.

Between 1958 and 1969, the EEC was dominated by the personality and ambitions of the president of France, Charles de Gaulle. The great French leader was determined to transform the EEC into a vehicle for French foreign policy and was adamant, too, that the member states should remain the Community’s key decision makers. This “intergovernmentalist” approach clashed with the more “federalist” conception of the treaty preferred by the European Commission and other enthusiasts for supranational government, and also led de Gaulle to block the entry into the Community of Great Britain, which he regarded, not entirely falsely, as an American stooge. Chapter 4 deals with the mark that de Gaulle left on the Community’s development, which was deeper than many historians of European integration have been wont to acknowledge.

Chapter 5, “Weathering the Storm,” is dedicated to the development of the Community in the 1970s. In retrospect, it is something of a miracle and a powerful testament to the sense of cohesion achieved by the European Community (EC) as the EEC began to be called from the late 1960s onward, that Western Europe did not revert to economic nationalism in the 1970s. Wildly swinging exchange rates, rampant inflation, low economic growth, and soaring oil prices were a recipe for protectionism. Instead, cooperation intensified. From December 1974, the EC’s heads of state and government began to meet on a regular basis in what became known as the European Council. This quintessentially intergovernmental body swiftly became the EC’s strategic decision-making body. The EC admitted Great Britain, Denmark, and Ireland to membership in 1973. The EC also strove to control the damaging effects of fluctuating exchange rates by instituting the European Monetary System (EMS) in 1979, and the member states agreed that the EC Assembly should be directly elected, making its pretensions to be an authentic parliament less risible. A string of sentences by the ECJ had, by the end of the 1970s,

established that the Treaty of Rome conferred rights directly on the citizens of the member states and that the regulations and directives made by Community institutions enjoyed supremacy over conflicting national laws. These achievements were remarkable given the economic and political turbulence of the 1970s.

The turning point in the history of European integration nevertheless undoubtedly comes between 1984 and 1992. A citizen transported forward in time from 1963 would have found the EC of 1983 essentially similar to the EEC of twenty years before. Trade was much freer, but even trade in merchandise was still obstructed by a host of nontariff barriers. Physical barriers—passport and customs controls—still blocked the movement of citizens of EC member states from one country to another. The EC was primarily concerned with agriculture. In the early 1980s agriculture took up nearly 80 percent of the Community’s budget, and the disagreements provoked by the costs of agricultural policy absorbed (it sometimes seemed) 99 percent of its energies.

Yet just ten years later, in 1993, our time traveller would have been astonished by the degree to which the Single European Act (SEA, 1986) and the Treaty on European Union (1992) were enabling people to move, buy, invest, and sell across the member states of what was now called the European Union. The traveller would, moreover, have been equally astonished at the policy responsibilities that had been transferred to the Community level and at the growing role played by the EU’s supranational institutions.

Chapters 6 and 7 describe how this transfer of responsibilities was decided and how and why the member states decided to move forward so far, so fast to “complete the single market” and, in the teeth of fierce British opposition, to complement the single market with a plan for a single currency, an autonomous central bank, and enhanced powers for the directly elected European Parliament. The shock of the unification of Germany was the decisive impulse for this acceleration in the pace and scale of European integration. The French historian Frédéric Bozo has rightly dubbed the Treaty on European Union that emerged at Maastricht a “quantum leap” for the integration project as a whole.⁴

The final two chapters are concerned with the European Union as it has developed since Maastricht. In brief, it is a story of hopes dashed, or at least blunted. After Maastricht, and especially after the introduction of the Euro in 2002, the EU enjoyed an Indian summer of favorable attention from the international punditocracy. The EU was depicted as an emerging superpower that would dominate the twenty-first century; an organization whose postnational institutions, environmental friendliness, commitment to peace and human rights, and general aura of sanctity made it an exemplar for the rest of the world—and especially for the “Toxic Texan” and the neoconservatives lurking within the Washington beltway. The EU would match the United States as a force in the world by virtue of its superior way of life, such commentators asserted boldly.⁵

Such panegyrics to the EU’s soft power attributes were taken seriously by some surprising people. The EU in the late 1990s and early 2000s generated a mood of progressivism that recalls, to those who have read both literatures, the enthusiasm of many liberal intellectuals and scholars across Europe for the League of Nations in the 1920s and early 1930s. In both

cases, ideals ran into blunt facts. In the 1930s, it was the rise of fascism that exposed the League's weaknesses; in the 2000s, economic issues and recalcitrant voters exposed the shortcomings of what this book has dubbed "EUphoria."

Chapters 8 and 9 deal with both this mood of optimism and with the EU's dashed hopes since 2005. Chapter 8 surveys four of the policy areas in which the EU took major decisions between 1992 and 2005: monetary union, enlargement to Central and Southeast Europe, the negotiation and subsequent electoral defeat of the EU Constitution, and the EU's dissensions over issues of foreign policy, especially the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which split it into two angrily divided camps. Restricting the chapter to these four areas obviously leaves out much of what the EU did in those years, but these areas are nevertheless the ones in which the EU's actions have some claim to the immediate attention of historians.

Chapter 9 concludes the book by examining the mood of crisis that has taken hold in the EU since 2005 and attempts to draw conclusions for the Union's future. These conclusions are necessarily both tentative and limited in scope. The EU's future may be predictable by Madame Sosostris's wicked pack of cards, but lesser mortals without this precious theoretical tool should acknowledge that almost anything, including the disintegration of the EU (but also the transformation of the EU, or a large part of it, into a federal state), is possible over the next five to ten years.⁶

This summary of the book's contents has already given away one point of narrative technique: the book is not what the historian Herbert Butterfield notoriously identified as "Whig history." The study of European integration has sometimes been the last redoubt of history of this kind. In much the same way that scholars once depicted English constitutional history as a seesaw battle between reformist "Whigs" (Liberals) and reactionary "Tories," in which British parliamentary democracy was at length perfected by Whig statesmen despite the low cunning and the self-interested opportunism of the Tories, so many scholars of European integration have portrayed European integration as a historical process whose forward march has been hampered by states and national leaders (de Gaulle and Margaret Thatcher—indeed British leaders more generally—have a starring role as villains) irrationally attached to the principles of national sovereignty, but which has issued nevertheless in a unique polity that is an example to the rest of the world.

The problem with seeing any history in terms of reactionaries versus progressives is that it "abridges"—to use Butterfield's term—the historical process. According to Butterfield, the historian's job is rather the "analysis of all the mediations by which the past was turned into our present." It is to "recapture the richness of the moments, the humanity of the men, the setting of the external circumstances, and the implications of events." When writing general history, which is of necessity a compressed summary of the whole, we have the right to expect, Butterfield adds, that the historian has not, by the selection and organization of the facts, "interpolated a theory . . . particularly one that would never be feasible if all the story were told in all its detail."⁸

I agree with Butterfield's injunctions on how to write general history. I have accordingly concentrated upon capturing much that was contingent about European integration and upon

evoking the drama of its many crises. Europe might have taken any number of forks in the road: striving to convey how easily things might have turned out differently at every juncture was the book's major challenge (and the one, whatever the book's defects, which I am most confident of having met). In addition, as I hinted earlier, I have made a deliberate choice not to advance a broad theory to explain the dynamic of European integration but to concentrate upon clarifying the issues at stake at any given moment in the EU's emergence and explaining specific outcomes in such detail as was possible given the amount of space available.

All the same, it is important for a general text not to become too immersed in detail. Detail for the sake of detail is an occupational hazard for professional historians, and European integration history—if a gentle euphemism may be permitted—is not immune from this failing. Just as the EU itself can seem forbidding and opaque to its citizens, so can the EU's history. Specialists who focus on a particular policy or event and conduct intensive archive research with a view to finding out what really happened dominate the corpus of work on the EU's history. This book, by contrast, attempts to identify what European integration has amounted to. I would be the first person to advocate supplementing this book with more detailed studies on individual chapters in the EU's story.

This caveat aside, I hope this book's attempt to represent what the Polish-British historian Lewis Namier called “the nature of the thing” is regarded as plausible. Historiography is ultimately portraiture, not scientific explanation. If a subject is drawn too boldly, it easily becomes a caricature; if drawn too fussily, it loses the character of the sitter. If it is drawn too remorselessly—warts and all—it will likely be relegated to the attic and kept out of public view. This book is not always a flattering portrait, but it is a sincere attempt to capture a very complex character in an impartial way. And if the finished portrait has too many wrinkles for the taste of some, it will at least act as a corrective to the many extant portrayals of a thriving subject blooming with health.