



Wilfried
Martens Centre
for European Studies

The European Peace:

The Miracle,
Its Causes, Its Limits

Edited by Alain Lamassoure and Teona Lavrelashvili



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This volume originated from an idea by Alain Lamassoure and benefited from his scientific guidance.

Introduction - European Peace, An Unnoticed Miracle

Alain Lamassoure and Teona Lavrelashvili

The curse of war has been part of the history of humanity, everywhere and at all times. People fight for land, for natural resources, for domination over a territory or a people, for religious faith, for the glory of a prince or a general, to channel popular anger against incapable leaders, to prevent defeat or to avenge a previous one.

At the same time, by bringing collective tension to its peak, war has shaped human societies, founded institutions, exalted ambitions, organised states, given birth to industry, fuelled revolutions, forged characters, inspired poets, and determined the progress of science and public life. In Roman mythology, Janus, the two-faced god, is described as the 'Father God', a title he shares only with Jupiter. He is the god of the passage of time: time flows from peace to war just as it flows from the past to the future, marked by the solemn opening and closing of the doors of his temple. In different eras, Archimedes, Leonardo da Vinci and Werner von Braun have embodied the ambivalence of science. The curse of war has accompanied, accelerated, hindered and diverted the progress of humanity.

Yet, in the twenty-first century, peace is regarded as the normal state of international life. War is experienced as an anomaly, now confined to specific regions. Opened by the Great War, the twentieth century ended with the Long Peace. The advent of the atomic age discouraged the great powers from confronting one another directly. This Long Peace did not prevent numerous peripheral conflicts, including dreadful civil wars, but the world has remained broadly at peace for the past eighty years. Competition shifted instead to the arena of 'gentle commerce', economic models

and technological revolutions. This made possible the globalisation of trade and, above all, the globalisation of industrial production systems.

Sheltered by this absence of war, Europeans built their own peace—a genuine peace: the reconciliation of hearts and minds among our peoples. Like the *Pax Romana*, the *Pax Americana* was an imperial peace, a pause in the history of peoples resigned to the relentless curse of war. The European peace was imposed neither by internal weakness nor by an external power. European integration, the common work of democratic states, created a space of peace from which any temptation of war disappeared, both among its members and towards the rest of the world.

For the signatories of the Treaty of Rome, it took only one generation: that of the baby boomers. In the western part of the continent, three successive generations have now grown up in peace, and the last two have not experienced compulsory military service either. For more than twenty years, the German Embassy in Paris has regularly commissioned opinion polls on the image of Germany among the French. To the question, ‘In your opinion, which people are closest to the French people?’, two-thirds of French respondents invariably answer: ‘the German people’. Italians, Spaniards and Portuguese are regarded as cousins, and hardly anyone knows anymore where the borders with Belgium and Luxembourg are. The successive enlargements of the EU have extended this chain of friendship. Germany and Poland validated a collection of history textbooks for secondary education that present a common narrative established by historians from both countries. Lithuania and Poland have proudly presented themselves as pioneers, for four centuries, of independence through interdependence. The Scandinavian countries did not wait for European treaties to cooperate within the Nordic Union.

However, none of this shields Europe from the noise and fury roaring at its gates. On 24 February 2022 Russian artillery brutally reminded us that we had fallen asleep like lambs in a world of wolves. In the spring of 2026, the two superpowers of the late twentieth century are now agreed that they are allowed to wage merciless wars: one on Europe’s very doorstep, the other in its closest eastern neighbourhood. So

many missiles have been launched in breach of international law, whose foundations and principles Europe itself invented. The miracle of European peace is now facing its first trial by a fire that is coming from elsewhere. It is, therefore, a good moment to attempt to analyse and understand it.

What do the actors, observers and researchers of this European peace say about it? How was it made possible in this particular place and historical moment? Is it truly deeply rooted: a miracle or a mirage? What are its scope and its limits? In the absence of animosity among our peoples, how much is due to indifference or resignation, and how much to mutual sympathy or even genuine fraternity? What tools did the architects of peace create for themselves? Why has this know-how not been exported elsewhere—not even across the rest of the Old Continent, let alone to the wider world? Will we even be able to pass it on to our own children?

After all, if, on our ‘small cape of Asia’, war is no longer a divine fatality, could it be that peace, now inscribed in the European epigenetic heritage, might itself acquire a contagious virtue?

Understanding European peace

The chapters that follow approach European peace from a variety of historical, political and disciplinary perspectives. They do not offer a single explanation of its origins or rely on one narrow definition. Instead, they reveal its multiple and interconnected dimensions.

At its most basic, peace means the absence of war. Yet the European experience suggests that this is only the starting point. European peace has also come to signify a political order in which disagreements are managed through law, negotiation, interdependence and common institutions. It rests on democratic legitimacy, social cohesion, political moderation and the difficult work of reconciliation.

A productive tension therefore runs throughout the volume between peace as an outcome and peace as a process. European peace transformed relations between

states and peoples, making war among EU members materially irrational and politically almost unthinkable. Yet this achievement was never self-sustaining. It endured because peace continued to be produced through law, institutional compromise, social arrangements, political cooperation and shared memories.

The volume also distinguishes between the peace within Europe and the peace produced by Europe. The post-war integration project developed under the protection of NATO and the American security guarantee, alongside colonial conflicts, the division of Europe and, later, violent wars in the Balkans. The EU succeeded in transforming relations among its members, but its ability to reproduce this model beyond its borders has remained uneven. Understanding European peace therefore requires attention not only to its achievements, but also to its dependencies, limitations and failures.

The preparation of this book benefited from workshops and exchanges with colleagues at the European University Institute. The editors would like to thank all the academics and experts who participated in the workshops and contributed to the development of this volume. They are particularly grateful to Dieter Schlenker and the Historical Archives of the EU for co-organising the workshop held at the European University Institute on 9 March 2026, and to Lorenzo Cicchi for his detailed feedback on the volume's conceptual framework.

Part I: The historical and security foundations of European peace

The first part examines the historical and strategic conditions under which European peace became possible. Alain Lamassoure places the post-war achievement within the context of Europe's much longer search for peace, tracing the development of law, diplomacy, arbitration and political projects intended to limit violence. Federico Romero emphasises the role of the Atlantic security architecture and the American guarantee in creating the conditions for reconciliation and integration. Dieter Schlenker identifies the archival paradox that peace, although a foundational promise of integration, often remains implicit in the institutional record. Philippe

Perchoc concludes the section by distinguishing negative peace—the absence of war—from positive peace, understood as a cooperative political order based on stable expectations of peaceful change.

Part II: European peace as a political, social and institutional order

The second part examines the political ideas, social structures and institutions that gave European peace greater depth. Jacopo Cellini explores the convergence of Christian Democratic, socialist and liberal traditions around cooperation, democracy, human rights and solidarity. Alain Lamassoure examines how these aspirations were embedded in the treaties and institutional arrangements of the Union. Angelos Chrysosgelos turns to the domestic foundations of peace, including welfare states, party systems and social solidarity, while Piero S. Colla analyses the role of memory, education and reconciliation. Alfredo De Feo and Giovanni Giangioffe assess the European Parliament's development as a peace actor, and Philippe Van Parijs revisits the relationship between commerce, interdependence and peace, asking why these mechanisms failed to produce a sustainable post-Cold War relationship with Russia.

Together, these chapters show that European peace was not created by treaties or markets alone. It depended on a broader political and social ecosystem capable of transforming disagreement into cooperation.

Part III: Preserving European peace: war, institutional adaptation and enlargement

The third section looks at the return of war, geopolitical competition and the future of the European peace project. Ana Palacio examines the need to combine law with leadership, strategic capacity and greater autonomy in a changing international order. Klaus Welle considers the relationship between the European Parliament, democratic compromise and peace, while Antje Herrberg asks whether the EU can preserve its peace identity while strengthening deterrence and defence. Alain Lamassoure shows

how European actors have responded to crises through institutional innovation and new methods of consensus-building. Finally, Teona Lavrelashvili examines how war and geopolitical urgency are reshaping EU enlargement and what this transformation means for the future of this enlargement as an instrument of European peace.

Herman Van Rompuy's epilogue returns the discussion to the human and moral foundations of peace, emphasising that political order depends not only on institutions and power, but also on trust, restraint and the willingness to resist fear and enmity.

Taken together, the contributions present European peace neither as a completed miracle nor as an abstract ideal. It is a historical achievement that survives only through continuous political, institutional, social and moral effort. It is both inheritance and responsibility, outcome and process.

Europe's challenge is therefore not simply to preserve the peace created by previous generations but to reproduce it under new conditions—and, where existing instruments are no longer sufficient, to invent new ones.

Part I – The Historical and Security Foundations of European Peace

Yesterday:

Warmakers, Peacemakers

Alain Lamassoure

How has the past prepared today's Europeans to forge their own peace? Over the long term, their fate has hardly differed from that of people in other continents: everywhere, famine, plague, natural disasters and war have been scourges that seemed inherent to the human condition. Everywhere, control over such unpredictable misfortunes seemed to be the sole preserve of the gods. To guard against them, in historical times, the political model of the empire—built on conquest but ensuring relative tranquillity for governed peoples in return for their servility—often prevailed: in the Middle East, Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in Mexico and equatorial America.

Europe's experience was different. It escaped subjugation to an empire: Roman rule extended along the Atlantic coast, but was fundamentally centred on the Mediterranean, *Mare Nostrum*. On our 'little cape on the Asian continent',¹ geography afforded several bordering territories equal opportunities for dominance, preventing any single state from subjugating its neighbours for any length of time. This political fragmentation exposed the region to a greater risk of conflict, but it also fostered a constant yearning for peace. For today's observers, the relentless recurrence of war tends to obscure this constant search for paths to peace in the past—a search repeatedly thwarted yet never discouraged. It has been little studied in its own right and deserves closer attention: two thousand years of failure have also left behind a long process of learning the art of peace.

First, internal peace

External wars display the most spectacular aspects of human violence. But the first step in the development of a civilisation is to establish the security of daily life within the community. Our continent has experienced the very long journey towards internal peace: this comprises the development of written law, which limits the arbitrary nature of duties and penalties; the principle of *habeas corpus*, which protects the

¹ P. Valéry, 'La Crise de l'esprit', in *Variété I* (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1924). First published in 1919.

individual against the whims of those in power; the concept of the state, as distinct from the person of the monarch; the redefinition of sovereign legitimacy as resting on more than force alone; the separation of faith and reason, and the independence of science from religious or political authority; the separation of political powers; and the practice of deliberation, followed by adversarial debate.

The prince plays the role of Hobbes's Leviathan, the giant sea creature that protects the weak from the greed of the more powerful. The standing army replaces mercenary troops, who lived off plunder. Patrols by armed guards ensure peace at night in the dark streets. The king's justice protects the burghers of the free city and lightens the burdens of the peasants. More effective law enforcement and the more systematic apprehension of offenders gradually reduced reliance on torture in criminal justice. First the kingdom's nobility, then the bourgeoisie and finally the common people are granted a say in decision-making. Constitutions make these advances permanent. Finally, universal suffrage takes hold. Parliament is the crucible in which elected representatives from all political parties develop a culture of democratic compromise.

The nation-state was born out of foreign war, but its primary merit lies in ensuring domestic peace and in fostering what Norbert Elias calls 'the civilisation of manners'. This art of internal peace has been shaped over the centuries, and it forms a fundamental basis for international peace: internal disorder spreads very quickly, but conversely, the techniques of internal peace can be applied to interstate relations. What interests us is when these dynamics erupt in violence which takes the form of war.

Just peace, or just war?

War occurs at the dawn of European history. Herodotus, the first historian to leave Europeans a record, tells us of the war the Greeks are said to have waged against the Trojans to atone for the marital infidelity of the Queen of Sparta, which was regarded as political treason. And from the very beginning, two characteristics emerge.

First is the aspiration for a return to peace. This sentiment would be trivial were it not accompanied by the search for concrete means of restoring peace. It is both a waking dream and an approach of unwavering pragmatism. Aristophanes tackles the root of the problem by inviting Lysistrata to advocate for a marital strike, but he has many other tricks up his sleeve in the comedy known as *Peace*. Even when they were subject to a power based on war, Europeans never grew weary of seeking paths to peace.

The second characteristic is the realisation that peace can be guaranteed only within a shared civilisation: since we have managed to maintain order within the city-state, can we extend what the English call ‘jurisdiction’? Empires do so, but by force. For Aeschylus, the common identity of all Greeks lies in the fact that they submit only to the law, whilst the ‘barbarians’ are under the yoke of a tyrant. Greeks of different regions share the same gods, the same language and the same legends: for Lysistrata and her companions, Athens and Sparta belong to the same family, which makes war between them as absurd as it is pointless. Plato sets out this theory by distinguishing between foreign war, *polemos*—which, unfortunately, is necessary and sometimes beneficial—and the harmful civil war, *stasis*.

Yet, we find these two traits recurring throughout the centuries: pragmatism in devising practical solutions, and the search for a suitable community in which to live in peace.

Rome built its republic and its empire on the strength of its legions. Pragmatism then led the Romans to seek ways of mitigating the suffering caused by warfare, which was deeply embedded in the life of Rome itself. Building on the thinking of the Greek philosophers, Cicero distinguished between the justification for war, the *jus ad bellum*, and the conduct of war, the *jus in bello*: even when waging a just war, ‘there is a law of war, and the oath sworn must be observed even against an enemy’. War must be waged without excessive violence and in proportion to the objective sought. And the rule is conceived on the scale of the relevant community, in this case the Roman Empire. Within it, the *Pax Romana* reigns.

Having become an empire, Rome converted to Christian monotheism. The two spheres—one geographical, the other political and religious—initially overlapped. But Rome ceased to exist as early as the century following Constantine's conversion. Under the onslaught of the barbarians, the Roman Empire fragmented into a feudal political mosaic. Then Christianity became the natural community of reference. It was a community united by the same hope in an afterlife and by the moral rules that this entailed in the material world.

At the same time, the terrible human regression of the 'Dark Ages' gave rise to nostalgia for the splendour of Rome and the *Pax Romana*, even amongst peoples who had never known them. Charlemagne's unexpected empire was bound to evoke the memory of Rome, whilst shifting its centre from the shores of the Mediterranean to the lower Rhine basin. For eight hundred years, a 'Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation' would nurture this dream of political, as well as religious, unity in what would gradually come to be known as Europe.

Alas, there was no *Pax Christiana*. The early ages of Christianity were anything but peaceful. For the theologians of a religion of love that relies on political power, the curse of war is a formidable challenge. The Gospel speaks to the individual, whose eternal salvation is at stake. It therefore tackles individual violence but leaves the management of political affairs to Caesar. The good Christian is called upon to turn the page on 'an eye for an eye', but the advice to turn the other cheek lacks credibility between kingdoms. Yet war, that perpetual scourge, cannot leave the Church silent.

Thus, caution and pragmatism prevail. Care is taken not to portray war as the work of the Evil One. Saint Augustine absolved combatants of the crime of murder: 'The soldier, in killing the enemy, is merely the minister of the law.' Those who merely carry out orders are thus forgiven, which is no minor matter in a religion centred on personal salvation. As for leaders, they are far from being automatically condemned for resorting to war: the only emperor to have achieved the feat of recapturing Jerusalem through negotiation alone, Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, was excommunicated for his approach, which was deemed much too diplomatic! Thomas

Aquinas explored the concept of 'just war' in greater depth, arriving at conclusions very similar to those of the Greek philosophers. War must be waged with a righteous intention, in order to restore justice; in such cases, it may even be preventive, but the ruler must also set himself the goal of reintegrating the parties involved into the peaceful community of nations.

These lofty principles leave considerable scope for interpretation regarding the legitimate authority to declare war, the gravity of the injustice that might justify it and the terms on which peace should ultimately be restored. There is further pragmatism to be seen when the Church establishes modest limits on violence, such as the Truce of God, the right of refuge in places of worship and a ban on the use, amongst Christians, of unfair weapons such as the crossbow.

Let us not be too quick to dismiss these efforts as quaint or outdated: at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the emergence of armed drones prompted similar debates about the morality not of the act of killing, itself, but of the means used to carry it out. But the Christian world was so unable to put an end to war that political powers multiplied within it in a particularly bellicose feudal system, whilst the Pope regularly had to defend his religious supremacy against the emperor, and his own sphere of influence against overly ambitious princes, with arms in hand.

At the turn of the millennium, Christendom itself split in two, between Rome and Constantinople. The consequences were unexpected. From the Great Schism (1054) onwards, the Christian West became the only region to experience a permanent clash between temporal and spiritual power. Everywhere else, the two were merged or conflated. The Byzantine emperor, the Ottoman sultan, the Emperor of China and the Tsar of Russia all benefited from this fusion of temporal and spiritual authority. The separation between God and Caesar was to be a key factor in the gradual independence from faith and the clergy that reason, philosophy, science, justice, political life and society acquired in the Western part of the continent. It was then that the City of Man was able to begin to free itself from the authority of the heralds of the City of God.

Modern times: philosophers, statesmen, lawyers, diplomats and soldiers took turns in the quest for peace

Shaped by scholastic thought, yet eager to ensure that reason prevailed, Renaissance generations were outraged by war. The entire body of Erasmus's work contributed to this sensibility. The commercial success of *In Praise of Folly*, translated from Latin into French, German and English, demonstrates the extent of the aspirations for peace amongst the educated elite of his time. Erasmus drives the point home in *War Is Sweet for Those Who Do Not Wage It* and in *The Lament for Peace*, in which the idea of peace is reviled and cast out by all nations.

This notion of peace began to be envisaged within the context of Europe, and political leaders were also working towards it. In the mid-fifteenth century, George of Podiebrad, King of Bohemia, proposed a *Congregatio Concordiae*—an assembly of representatives of Christian peoples—which would have the power to arbitrate and impose 'international' sanctions on those who disobeyed the terms of the agreement. In the aftermath of the fall of Constantinople, Cardinal Enea Silvio Piccolomini, who would later become Pope Pius II, wrote *De Europa*. In it, he sketched a portrait of Christian states and nations, seeking to identify the common cultural traits that distinguished them from Asian and other civilisations. In the seventeenth century, two leading statesmen, both former French prime ministers—the Duke of Sully, in his *Économies royales*, and Cardinal Richelieu, in his *Testament politique*—tried their hand at the same exercise. Shortly afterwards, the Moravian bishop Jan Amos Komenski, known as Comenius, left behind an unfinished work with an ambitious title: *Universal Deliberation on the Reform of Human Affairs*. He proposed establishing a grand global federation—religious, cultural and political in nature—which he called *Panergesia* or 'Universal Awakening'.

Meanwhile, galleons and caravels had set sail from all the Atlantic coasts to discover other continents. Thought had broadened to translate Christian principles into

concrete rules that could guide Europeans wherever they went in their explorations and which would also be acceptable to, or enforceable against, the rest of the world. The Dominican friar Francisco de Vitoria and the School of Salamanca proclaimed the spiritual and legal equality of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas. De Vitoria and his colleagues proposed the organisation of humanity into a community of nations based on natural law, in which international relations could no longer be founded solely on the use of force. The Flemish scholar Hugo de Groot made this the foundation of his treatise *On War and Peace*, which he dedicated to the French king, Louis XIII. Thus, the foundations of international law were laid. At the same time, the foundations of diplomatic practice were established: the inviolability of representatives authorised to negotiate, permanent ambassadors accredited by the sovereign of the host country and respect for the confidentiality of diplomatic correspondence.

The first large-scale application of these new principles took place at the Congress of Westphalia in 1648. The aim was to bring an end to the Thirty Years' War, which had engulfed the whole of Western Christendom and decimated Germany's population by a third. This was a major innovation: a peace treaty that was not merely signed between two parties to the conflict, but to which the plenipotentiary representatives of all European sovereigns were invited, including all the German states, all the Swiss cantons and the Vatican.

In particular, the signatories mutually recognised each other's external and internal sovereignty, a guarantee of stability that was clearly more significant within this multilateral framework than in individual agreements between any two countries. Furthermore, the widespread adoption of the principle '*cujus regio, ejus religio*' — 'whose realm, his religion', meaning that the ruler determined the religion of the territory — served to discourage rulers from interfering in one another's religious affairs.

Following heated discussions, territorial exchanges were carried out with a view to maintaining a balance between the major powers of the time. The Westphalian treaty brought an end to religious conflicts in Central Europe and recognised the independence of the United Provinces and of the Swiss Confederation. In reality,

hostilities scarcely ceased: France and Spain continued their conflict for a further ten years, then another ten, until a European coalition rose against the territorial ambitions of Louis XIV.

Nevertheless, the ‘Westphalian system’ remained the benchmark model for the continent’s political organisation and for peace treaties for the next three centuries.

From reason to reasoned utopia

Since the proliferation of universities from the thirteenth century onwards, philosophers and scientists have transcended both geographical and disciplinary boundaries. It is no coincidence that the names of Erasmus, Leonardo and Comenius have been given to programmes supporting the mobility of students and teachers within the EU. All of Europe’s elites have become accustomed to meeting, exchanging ideas and working together. Artists undertook the ‘journey to Rome’. What is known as the ‘Republic of Letters’ was an extraordinary network of co-opted elites, amongst whom information, arguments, debates and disciples circulated. It extended far beyond the great capitals of power and learning.

Europe’s diversity enhanced rather than hindered the free flow and ready exchange of ideas: persecuted by the Church or by a suspicious monarch, philosophers might find refuge with their neighbours. As late as 1600, the Pope had Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno burned at the stake, but what could he do against the Flemish heretics? The Vatican condemned Galileo’s heliocentric theory, but René Descartes, conveniently based in Holland, responded with the *Discourse on the Method*. This was the era during which Amsterdam published all the books banned elsewhere in Europe. Science broke free from politics, just as it had from alchemy.

These moments demonstrate not merely a quest for knowledge, but also a search for new ways to influence nature and the world. And the search was ‘denationalised’ — understood as a common good of humanity, to the extent that Europeans never hesitated to make the most of exotic discoveries: they learned in China how to make paper and black powder; they used ‘Arabic’ numerals invented in India; they

rediscovered Aristotle through translations by the Persian Avicenna; and the University of Paris established a chair dedicated to the thought of the philosopher Averroes, an Andalusian Muslim.

The compilation of ancient wisdom was not enough to quench their thirst for knowledge. In distillation stills, through telescopes and across the seas, Europeans discovered poisons, celestial bodies, plants, animals and people of whom neither the Bible nor Aristotle spoke: their gaze turned away from the past to seek truths not to be found in grimoires. This was the first of Europe's revolutions, and the most significant, because it paved the way for all the others.

From the seventeenth century onwards, the 'salons'—generally hosted by prominent aristocratic women keen on modernity—disseminated artistic works and scientific knowledge amongst the elites of the time. This European 'web' contributed greatly to the gradual application of the laws of hard science to the management of human affairs, through observation, reason and the lessons of experience, thereby giving rise to the human sciences.

Building on this momentum, the Enlightenment produced a uniquely European explosion of ideas. The Swiss scholar Emer de Vattel wrote *The Law of Nations*, a code of conduct governing relations between states on land and at sea. Montesquieu, the mayor of Bordeaux, deserves credit on two counts. He conceived of a federation as a political system in its own right, at a time when no such system yet existed. And he made Europe a subject of universal history, transcending the nations that comprise it.

As the misfortunes of war were becoming increasingly difficult to bear, and the benefits of trade so obvious, the time had come for peaceful coexistence. 'Europe is now nothing more than a single nation composed of many.' Each nation needs the others, and 'the state which believes it can increase its power through the ruin of its neighbour usually weakens itself along with that neighbour'.²

2 Montesquieu, *Réflexions sur la monarchie universelle*, XVIII.

Working towards the triumph of reason in all human affairs, the heralds of the Enlightenment even went so far as to dream of perpetual peace, and philosophers and diplomats debated fiercely the means of achieving it: the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, one of the negotiators of the Treaty of Utrecht, Frederic de Gentz, who would go on to become the all-powerful Secretary-General of the Congress of Vienna, took part in these discussions alongside Immanuel Kant, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Kant sought to link the morality of individuals with that of nations, the categorical imperative with cosmopolitan organisation. Rousseau introduced two highly innovative dimensions. On the one hand, he did not believe in a Europe of princes and campaigned for 'a society of the peoples of Europe', united within a European Republic. On the other hand, he considered Europe not merely an 'ideal collection of peoples who have nothing in common but their name' but 'a real society which has its own religion, its own manners, its own customs and even its own laws, from which none of the peoples comprising it can deviate without immediately causing unrest'. He proposed establishing a 'Congress of Plenipotentiaries of the European Body' and went into detail regarding voting rights and contributions to finance the budget of this confederation. Recourse to arbitration would be compulsory. A common defence would ensure that decisions were enforced and that redress was provided for wrongs committed.

Were these utopian or prophetic dreams? The outlines are expanding and becoming clearer.

The Concert of Europe

Between 1792 and 1815, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars not only plunged Europe into a cycle of wars that ravaged the entire continent, but they called into question the very legitimacy of monarchical power. Europe had to rebuild a new political order. The Peace of Westphalia had introduced the method of universal congresses, drawn up borders and established rules, but compliance with these was left to the discretion of the parties involved.

In 1815 the Congress of Vienna was more ambitious. It established what came to be known as the ‘Concert of Europe’—a whole diplomatic framework designed to ensure the implementation of the treaties that had redrawn the map of Europe. Whenever there was a risk of a serious breach of the treaty rules, the sovereigns would reconvene in congress. Drawing on their experience of the struggle against Napoleon, they were able to decide on joint military action. Between congresses, their ambassadors ensured implementation through conferences and kept abreast of diplomatic developments in meetings.

Thanks to this understanding between the powers, the beginnings of an international administration took shape with the ‘administrative unions’, the Rhine Commission, the Danube Commission and, towards the end of the century, the Postal Union, the Telegraph Union, the Weights and Measures Union, and even the protection of industrial property. The first ‘global commons’ began to emerge. The measurement of time, distances, weights and temperature, as well as the names of the continents, were harmonised amongst Europeans and became universal standards.

Whether written or implicit, a body of principles now governs relations between European states: these include independence, reciprocity, solidarity and respect for treaties. They also involve the accepted pre-eminence of the great powers on matters of general interest, the search for a reasonable and acceptable balance amongst them, recognition of each power’s right to control its ‘backyard’ and the pursuit of peaceful means prior to the use of force to resolve conflicts of interest amongst them.

The ‘Concert of Europe’ did not make a favourable impression on the revolutionary and/or nationalist movements of the nineteenth century. In Spain, Italy, Austria and Hungary, the expeditionary forces sent by neighbouring monarchies were a far cry from modern-day UN peacekeepers and their civilised methods. The spirit of the ‘concert’ allowed the Russians to drown successive Polish uprisings in blood. And the ‘musicians’ were able to put this *savoir-faire* to good use in carving up Africa at the Berlin Conference.

Yet, this political and diplomatic organisation secured thirty years of peace for

the continent, during which it saw Greece and Belgium gain independence. And whilst the Concert changed in nature after 1849, it was still able to play a role in the Balkan independence movements that accompanied the decline of the Ottoman Empire: Romania and Serbia gained independence in 1878, Bulgaria in 1908 and Albania in 1913.

Finally, whilst there was no shortage of armed conflicts during this period—notably during the ‘Spring of Nations’ in 1848 and in the context of the unification of Italy and Germany—the Concert contributed to the absence of a general war on the continent until 1914, throughout the century of Europe’s industrialisation. Ultimately, the deadliest conflict of the early industrial age was the American Civil War.

The ‘age of the masses’

Another category of actors emerged in the nineteenth century: the press, and with it—alongside the extension of suffrage and the development of education—learned societies, leading humanist voices, the forerunners of non-governmental organisations and, ultimately, public opinion. The people had their say in foreign policy.

Sometimes this turns out for the worse. A common misconception attributes war to the pride of monarchs or the greed of arms dealers. But when the people take up a cause, popular fervour can easily lead to extremes. In the absence of a decisive military victory, a compromise to end hostilities must allow each side to save face. A humiliated monarch may abdicate, taking full responsibility for the failure upon him- or herself. But what of a humiliated people? In 1839, a distant war between the Turkish sultan and the Pasha of Egypt so inflamed the people on both sides of the Rhine that the French and Germans began to regard one another as ‘hereditary enemies’ from that moment onwards. On that occasion, wise leaders managed to calm the people’s stirred passions. But once war is unleashed, with a mass mobilisation, the tragic spiral of justifying sacrifices begins: the more deaths there are, the more it must be guaranteed that they did not die in vain.

On both sides, the combatants and their families need to be convinced that they

represent the side of good against evil. This dynamic seems to be inescapable. Henry Kissinger observed that, according to the civilised customs of the eighteenth century, the Great War should have ended in the West as early as 1915: the blitzkrieg of the Schlieffen Plan had failed, the fronts had stabilised, the quest for a decisive breakthrough would have been too costly and common sense dictated that the war should have ended there, returning to the *status quo ante*. But public opinion would not have accepted this. And yet, the stakes of this unprecedented carnage were not existential, not for France, nor for Germany, nor for Russia or Italy.

Fortunately, outside periods of tension, organised public opinion can also work for the greater good. In the nineteenth century, the abolition of slavery, first in England and then in France, was the culmination of the efforts of powerful abolitionist societies, whose driving role was decisive. In the 1840s, pacifist societies organised the first peace congresses. In 1849, the Paris congress was chaired by Victor Hugo. A portion of the opening speech he delivered there deserves to be quoted in full. A prophet of the United States of Europe and a peace activist, he concluded, 'In our old Europe, England took the first step, and through its centuries-old example it told the peoples: you are free. France took the second step, and it told the peoples: you are sovereign. Now let us take the third step, and all together—France, England, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Europe, America—let us tell the peoples: you are brothers!'

The peace movement reached its peak at the conferences held in The Hague in 1899 and then in 1907, organised at the initiative of Tsar Nicholas II. The latter conference brought together 43 nations and 300 delegates and experts over a period of six months. It ushered in the era of institutional multilateralism. The principles that would underpin the League of Nations were proclaimed: the universal nature of the conference, the affirmation of legal equality between states, the obligation to submit all disputes to arbitration, and the pursuit of compromise and a unanimous vote. It was then that the Permanent Court of Arbitration, based in The Hague, was established.

In another civil society initiative, around the same time, national rivalries found a peaceful outlet in sport. The Olympic movement took shape independently of

nation-states. The phenomenal development of the railways facilitated a new activity: tourism. The horrors caused by modern weapons led to the founding of the Red Cross by the Swiss Henri Dunant. The first of the Geneva Conventions, protecting the wounded and defining war crimes, was adopted in 1864. From then on, a war crime entailed individual criminal liability for acts such as the intentional killing of civilians or prisoners of war, torture, sexual violence, looting, mass executions or the conscription of children. But let us not forget that these relative advances in civilisation on the Old Continent coincided with the height of colonisation in Africa and Asia, amidst a race by the colonising nations to outdo another in showing that they had a clear conscience regarding 'less advanced civilisations'.

The twentieth century: the suicide of a civilisation?

The Industrial Revolution and the inexorable march towards democracy changed the nature of conflicts. The Great War ushered in an era of doubt: people now wondered, what is the point of our religion of love, our Enlightenment—which now illuminates the five continents—economic and political progress, and the miracles of science, if they only result in Europe becoming the crucible of the industrialisation of massacres? In 1919, in *La crise de l'esprit*, Paul Valéry wrote: 'We civilisations now know that we are mortal.'

Before the philosophers, still reeling from the shock, could regain their capacity for analysis, a pragmatic approach was set in motion. The League of Nations was an American idea, but it became a European reality once the US Senate refused to ratify it. Gone were the power struggles of *realpolitik*, or the quest for the balance of power! The international order must be founded on democracy, the right of peoples to self-determination and collective security.

Let us learn the lesson from the disappointing history of the League of Nations. What is surprising is not that it failed to prevent the Second World War: the absence of the US, Germany and the USSR from the founding members doomed the experiment

to failure from the outset. What is surprising—and reassuring—are the small steps that were taken towards maintaining peace despite these paralysing constraints.

Admittedly, the Briand-Kellogg Pact remained a model of declaratory diplomacy based on good intentions. But the League of Nations helped to find compromises on seemingly intractable bilateral disputes, such as the status of the Saar, the ports of Danzig and Memel, Upper Silesia and the Mosul oil field. It provided an international legal framework for the decolonisation of the non-European territories of Germany and Turkey, the defeated states. Its specialised agencies foreshadowed the World Health Organization in the fight against malaria, typhus and yellow fever, just as the International Labour Organization did by tackling the harsh conditions of labour, and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization by regularly bringing together the most influential intellectuals of the time. Fridtjof Nansen's Refugee Commission tackled head-on what was to become a scourge of the century: the mass exoduses of populations driven out by victorious nationalist powers. Finally, a first generation of 'peace officials' was trained at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, including a certain Jean Monnet, who would go on to draw the right lessons from this endeavour, which was too ambitious to succeed.

The interwar period saw the emergence of other types of initiatives, which were also short-lived but which provided lessons for the future. A very early proposal for a political union of Europe was put forward by French diplomacy. It was drawn up, under the authority of Aristide Briand, by the brilliant Secretary-General of the Quai d'Orsay, Alexis Léger, the future Nobel laureate in literature. The crisis of 1929, unfortunately, removed it from the agenda. Another utopian vision emerged in 1932: to address the consequences of the former crisis on the fragile new states of Central Europe, the Tardieu Plan foreshadowed the Marshall Plan as a mechanism for the benefit of a hypothetical Danube Federation invited to form a common market. None of this ever came to fruition. But ideas were taking shape.

For its part, civil society rallied to encourage Europeans to overcome national prejudices. In 1922, a 'globalised' figure, Count von Coudenhove-Kalergi, founded

the pan-European movement. He posed a question that remains relevant a hundred years later: 'Can Europe, in its political and economic fragmentation, ensure its peace and independence in the face of rapidly growing non-European world powers?'

Shortly afterwards, in a pamphlet with the telling title *Address to the European Nation*, the French philosopher Julien Benda referred to the Crusades, revolutions, colonisation, the Reformation and class struggle, concluding, 'All these European movements have done absolutely nothing to further the unity of Europe. Why? Because Europe, whilst carrying them out, was not aware of them as European in nature; because its peoples *endured* the commonality of their interests and *experienced* the shared nature of their sentiments but did not *reflect* upon them' (emphasis in the original).

Alas, this was also the period when totalitarian ideologies, born in Europe, were to overwhelm the countries rendered most vulnerable by the consequences of defeat and by the crisis of 1929. Seemingly cured of religious fanaticism and converted to the teachings of science, the countries of the continent were then gripped by racism, nationalism and the most extreme form of class struggle. The Wagnerian apocalypse of 1945 did not merely sweep away Nazism. It appears to have marked the twilight of the ideals that had given Europe its greatness.

This failure is also that of international law. Clearly, there is no such thing as a 'clean' war. Distinguishing between war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide seems a thoroughly futile exercise in casuistry. For this subtle gradation of horrors has no effect whatsoever—neither on the perpetrators nor, naturally, on the victims and nor, for that matter, on the victors. Whilst defining *jus in bello*, Cicero harboured few illusions when he wrote soberly, 'Laws are silent in the midst of war.' In 1945, once the guns had fallen silent, the victors were keen to subject the principal Nazi and Japanese leaders to an ad hoc judicial process rather than summary executions. This was the victors' justice, allowing the full blame to be placed solely on the German and Japanese nationalists, whilst granting Stalinist communism an ecumenical absolution—which turns out to be highly useful for the current Russian narrative of the 'Great Patriotic War'.

Hannah Arendt's surprise at discovering the 'banality of evil' whilst attending the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem illustrated the incredible naivety of a certain European philosophy in the face of the everyday evil of wartime.

Behind the veil of war

To take stock of the past, we must make the enormous mental effort to free ourselves from the tyranny of teleology, the idea of inevitability. The temptation is so strong. The chapter that one has just finished reading always seems to be the inevitable culmination of those that preceded it. And how can we keep ourselves from succumbing to the impression that all efforts pointing in a different direction were doomed from the outset and are forever discredited? Yet chronology is merely a narrative; it is not an explanation—unless we are prepared to abandon the historian's task altogether. Behind the veil of the narrative lie other possibilities, thwarted by chance and the slow germination of multiple futures.

Yes, Europeans have earned a well-founded reputation as peoples who have for too long been trapped in a culture of war. Yes, the gulf between their increasingly generous principles and their increasingly blind and murderous actions, on an ever-larger scale, has become an abyss with the advent of industry and the 'age of the masses'. Yet these incorrigible warmongers were also tireless seekers of peace. Between one massacre and the next, and even during the massacres themselves, there were 'men of good will' who relentlessly continued on the quest for an impossible peace. Depending on the era, they were philosophers, theologians, courtiers, diplomats, monarchs, bourgeoisie, merchants, scholars, writers, soldiers, elected representatives and ordinary people. Now, all this time after 1945, when the right conditions of 'temperature' and 'pressure' are finally in place to bring about a profound change in the mindset of peoples, the concepts of theorists, the expertise of diplomats, the tools of practitioners and the legacies of those who have reached the age of wisdom will be able to be put to good use by the pioneers of a distinctly European art of peace.

About the author

Alain Lamassoure is a former French Minister for European Affairs and Minister for the Budget, and a former Member of the European Parliament, where he served from 1989 to 1993 and from 1999 to 2019. He chaired the European Parliament's Committee on Budgets and participated in the Convention on the Future of Europe in 2002–3. He is currently Chair of the Scientific Council of the Robert Schuman Foundation and Chair of the Governing Board of the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe.

Security and European Peace

Federico Romero

Retracing the dynamics of the *European peace*, reassessing its historical roots and evaluating its key elements is more relevant and more urgent today than ever before. Peace is not faring well all around us; in many crucial areas it has been violated and endangered. Even more ominously, powerful actors are deliberately, systematically and aggressively dismantling the rules, institutions and practices of international peace, deriding its culture and assailing the concept itself. Thus, the effort that went into this book is most timely and welcome, as are the reflections and arguments advanced in the various essays.

The European peace has been important in transforming Europe and Europeans: in reshaping attitudes, behaviour and institutions on our continent. But outside Europe's boundaries it has had much less traction and is openly, sometimes contemptuously, rejected by several other actors. Thus, in this commendable attempt to analyse the concept and its evolving context, to understand its conditions and to learn all its lessons, we should also bring to the fore and evaluate all those elements that the European peace did *not* achieve and did *not* reach or affect. This is what I will try to do by focusing on three main points.

The first of these concerns security: the changing perceptions of it and the structures devised to strengthen it. More specifically, I intend to address the relevance of security as a *precondition* for European peace, rather than dwell on the opposite—and far more common—notion of the European peace as a crucial factor for enhanced security. Of all the social scientists who study European integration in its various aspects, and particularly its multifaceted relationship to peace and international cooperation, historians are usually the least prone to foregrounding peacebuilding and acclaiming it as a main achievement, or even as a crucial outcome, of the European project.

We historians usually contend that, as Kiran Patel put it, the European Community (EC) 'profited more from relative peace in Europe . . . than it contributed' to it.¹ It is not that we belittle the contribution of the EC and then the EU to stability and prosperity. Nor do we underestimate the culture of reconciliation and cooperation

1 K. K. Patel, *Project Europe: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 80.

and its importance for an overarching narrative of peace—far from it. Historians' prevailing attitude derives from a deep-rooted awareness that Robert Schuman and the other founding fathers could launch the various European integration projects because they felt they operated within a framework of basic security and could rely on it. It is highly symptomatic, and quite revealing, that they first looked at security arrangements—with the Franco-British treaty of Dunkirk in 1947, then the Brussels Pact in 1948 and, above all, the Atlantic Alliance of 1949. Only then, when the key pillars of a basic security architecture were in place—and held together in a necessary, dependable way by the vital American guarantee—could France and other European governments move on to pursue a systemic reconciliation with Germany, as proposed by Schuman with his 1950 declaration.

Let us just compare, for the sake of clarity, this sequence of key post-war initiatives and decisions with the peace that was *not* made at Versailles in 1919—when the very notion of a security guarantee was short-sightedly rejected by the UK and the US.² We can immediately see the portentous difference between the punitive, fragile and fateful peace that ensued then, and the confident, optimistic thrust towards the mutual interpenetration of trade, institutions and rules that from 1950 onwards made Europe as we know it, and nurtured the European peace we value so much. Neither France nor any other country in post-war Western Europe could have contemplated, much less promoted, reconciliation, deep integration and cooperation in the absence of a basic but reliable degree of international security. The Atlantic Alliance and the Western economic and political compact that went with it offered a long-term prospect of security within (Western) Europe, and of course on what was then its external border with the Soviet sphere. This was a *sine qua non* for the confidence and courage inherent in the Schuman proposal and the other integrative decisions that followed the pioneering establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community.

This key condition then hardened over time in a division of labour that became

2 See P. Jackson and W. Mulligan, 'The Crisis of Power Politics', in P. Jackson, W. Mulligan and G. Sluga (eds.), *Peacemaking and International Order After the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

entrenched after the failed attempt at a European Defence Community in 1954.³ NATO dealt with security and defence, the EC/EU with all the other pillars of a peaceful order: stability, prosperity, cooperation and rule of law. There was a moment, with détente in the 1970s, when the key concepts of the European peace—mutual opening, rapprochement, cooperation and agreed rules—managed to influence and moderate East–West relations. And this prepared the ground for the post-1989 pan-European expansion of the European peace sphere⁴—so much so that we came to identify the European peace project with peace itself, and were brutally shocked out of this delusion in recent years, when war reappeared on our continent and—no less relevantly—the very culture of peace through cooperation came under attack from within.

This brings me to the second topic. In European political jargon it would be labelled ‘enlargement’, but my point is that beyond enlargement there should be a foreign policy, and too often this has been lacking or insufficient. One of the precepts of the EC/EU was that enlargement equalled a positive expansion of the European peace sphere, a validation of its principles and inherent values, and further proof of its general, if not universal, validity. Yet, enlargement is by definition also the construction of a new external border, a redrawing of the map with very different consequences for those who become member states and insiders, and those who remain on the other side of the border and are the new outsiders, so to speak. The latter find themselves at the boundary of a mighty, expanding power, usually with mutual trade relationships but very little voice, if any, on policies and rules. We experienced the difficulties and tensions this process generated in the complicated relationship with Türkiye and yet failed to predict and prevent the far more momentous consequences that the twin expansion of NATO and the EU would eventually bring in relations with Russia. Putin’s bellicose imperialist nationalism has many roots and causes—and in my opinion, it must be fought, as the Ukrainians are doing, and possibly rolled back—but this does not exempt the EU (and obviously NATO) from re-examining its own diplomatic

3 W. Loth, *Building Europe: A History of European Unification* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015), 36–53.

4 U. Krotz, K. K. Patel and F. Romero (eds.), *Europe’s Cold War Relations: The EC Towards a Global Role* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

failures. In spite of our own post-1945 experience—the conceptual foundation of the European peace notion—after 1989 we did not negotiate a mutually agreed order with Russia. Rather, we pursued enlargement with scarce attention to the character and consequences of economic change in Europe’s bigger neighbour, we failed to take notice of the aggrieved and hostile voices coming from Moscow, and we did not anticipate the possibility of an antagonistic challenge from Russia until it was much too late.⁵

I am not arguing that the idea of European peace made us naively blind. After all, the US and NATO took a far harder and more momentous stance on these issues, with even more shortsighted disdain for the potential and predictable consequences. But I am suggesting that the European peace is an insufficient concept if it does not manage to look beyond its borders and does not acknowledge that its own principles and tenets may not apply there. These may be interpreted as expansionist and self-serving when examined through the lenses of different cultures and therefore come across as unwelcome. Besides, they are often branded as instances of the West’s double standard, especially when human rights are concerned (and in view of our history of complicated, difficult relations with the global South, there is no easy way to defend them against such accusations).

In any case, a European peace construct needs to be anchored in, and structured within, a solid framework of security, and preferably one that is shared and inclusive. But if there is no other way, as is unfortunately the case in today’s Europe, it will have to be a framework decided on unilaterally, considering the difficult choices being contemplated for defence and continental security.

My third point concerns one key set of actors in the European peace project in the past as well as in the less definable present. These are the nation-states of Europe, particularly the relatively large and powerful ones. We are well aware that

5 B. Knautz and L. P. Schmelter, *Conference Report on ‘The Failure of the Post-Cold War Global Order?’* H-Diplo, Robert Jervis International Security Studies Forum (29 February 2024); M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

the European peace nurtured and empowered very specific agents, from European institutions to non-governmental actors that were often connected in a variety of trans-national networks. Yet, national governments and the primary constituencies they relate to—the citizens/voters—retained crucial roles. They matter in our story and our current conversation, not least for one key feature of the EC/EU relations with the outer world.

One of the core difficulties we face today stems from the member states' persistent refusal to transfer foreign policy prerogatives and agency to the EC/EU. This is the case especially when issues of security and defence are involved. Their control over resources, decisions and actions linked to international relations has not only made the EU an unusual, almost amputated kind of state formation. It has also entrenched a detrimental separation between, on one hand, the integrative sphere in which the European peace is centred, cultivated and structured and, on the other hand, the realm of 'hard' security policy, virtually monopolised by the national governments and NATO. Hence, we have a sort of schizophrenic Europe, and the detrimental rhetoric about EU weakness versus NATO strength, Atlantic resolve against European softness and so on.

Conceiving of these two realms as separate and contrasting makes for a shoddier approach to both peacebuilding and security issues (especially since the latter are entrusted not to a single unit, but to multiple, often diverging national actors). In the first place, it does not combine the respective assets and resources—the 'hard' and the 'soft' ones, if we want to use this handy but misleading terminology—in an integrated, synergic approach to international stability, cooperation and security.

Second, when we face foreign crises, such a separation exposes us to a recurrent lack of, or at least a mismatch between, the conceptual *and* operational tools that are available. Even in the best-case scenario, there is an inherent weakness and ineffectiveness when an ad hoc package has to be patched up with—let us say—a bit of French military strength, perhaps German or Spanish technical assistance, and the European Commission's institutional and development plans.

Besides, history has shown us again and again that the member states very often have different, even conflicting, foreign policy goals and priorities, with all the paralysing consequences this entails for Europe. To mention just the most glaring examples, they have been split on the breakup of Yugoslavia, on the 2003 invasion of Iraq, on relations with Trump, on NATO commitments, on the war against Gaza, and even on basic strategies in the early stages of the Ukrainian crisis and war.

The end result of these deep historical determinants is that now that we desperately need both approaches—security *and* peace, defence *and* cooperative recipes—we have a hard time integrating them. We can already see that the ongoing defence build-up will not be centred on, and led by, the EU: at the very best, it will be in the hands of a coalition of European states, as will policies related to the multiple Middle Eastern crises. The key institutions of European peace, on the one hand, and of Europe's defence, on the other, will therefore continue to remain separate, as two connected but distinct realms governed by different institutions and logics.

I believe this to be the basic challenge we are facing. As the world's major powers choose war, coercion and domination, wilfully destroy the rules-based order and scorn the very notion of international cooperation, we are more than ever in need of the intellectual, ethical and practical contribution that the European peace concept can provide. But we can only keep it alive and updated if we Europeans manage to amalgamate it with the continent's new, tentative effort at defence and international assertiveness. Thus, we must create that synergic combination that for too long has eluded us, and that is the fundamental requirement for a proactive, internationally influential, autonomous European actor.

We cannot know when, where or even *whether* a more collaborative, peaceful and multilateral approach to international relations will reemerge from the ongoing violent, disorderly disruption. But we can be reasonably certain that if the European peace approach and the continent's defence priorities are not combined in a mutually reinforcing dynamic, none of them will succeed and continue to define contemporary Europe, much less offer a proposal and prospects for the wider world.

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About the author: *Federico Romero is Professor Emeritus at the European University Institute, Florence. He is a specialist in twentieth-century international and transnational history, with research focusing on the Cold War, transatlantic relations, post-war European reconstruction, migration and European integration. He previously taught at the London School of Economics, the College of Europe, and the Universities of Bologna and Firenze, and has held visiting fellowships at Yale, Columbia and the University of New Mexico.*

Europe and Peace in the Records Held at the Historical Archives of the EU

Dieter Schlenker

This chapter examines the references to peace, its relevance to the long history of European integration, and its actual presence as a common vision and goal in the holdings of the Historical Archives of the EU (HAEU) at the European University Institute in Florence. Peace was the foundational promise of post-war European integration and a central element in the Schuman Declaration of 1950, which envisaged a new supranational European community. Nonetheless, an assessment of the archival holdings at the HAEU suggests that the topic of peace is not particularly well represented in the institutional records that document the history of the European Communities and their successor, the EU. Rather, references to peace appear in the documents as a backdrop to the debates on political and economic integration, and as a self-evident assumption rather than a subject of discussion. In the archives, the topic of peace thus surfaces only indirectly. Mention of its conceptualisation as the foundation of European integration was quickly replaced by the topics of security and defence, which particularly emerged during the Cold War negotiations on the European Defence Community in the early 1950s.

Peace appears as the initial driver of the post-war Franco-German reconciliation activities led by the European federalist movements, which included the twinning of cities and regions and other cross-border initiatives. But even in these activist fields of European cooperation, peace itself was not generally the main subject of discussion, research or debate, but served as the basic common denominator and precondition for concrete activities on reconciliation. The paradox that peace was the guiding principle and umbrella for the process of European integration and yet is absent in terms of collections on the subject in the archives creates an unexpected tension between expectations and results within the archival legacy on European unity.

The aim of securing global peace was a key principle of multilateralism and its institutionalisation through the formation of international organisations. The very first international organisation, the Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine, was a direct result of the 1815 Vienna Congress that reshaped peace in Europe after the Napoleonic Wars. Universal peace movements emerged in the nineteenth century and culminated in the ambitious first global peace conference, which was initiated

by Czar Nicholas II and hosted by Queen Wilhelmina in 1899 at the Huis ten Bosch in The Hague. Over the course of 3 months, more than 100 delegates from 26 countries discussed how conflicts between countries could be resolved peacefully and how a culture of peace could be promoted globally through disarmament, international jurisdiction and arbitration. For the first time, peace was discussed when there was no war, laying the fundament for the establishment of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 1899 and the Peace Palace in 1913, both in The Hague.

In response to the massive violence and destruction of the two subsequent world wars, even more ambitious peace projects followed, first with the establishment of the League of Nations in 1919 and then, after the Second World War, with the creation of the UN in 1945.

1945: peace and European cooperation

The end of the Second World War in Europe, on 8 May 1945, was considered ‘zero hour’, the date of liberation for the European continent, particularly for all those who had resisted and fought against the Nazi aggressors in the armies of the Allied nations, or as clandestine fighters in the resistance. The quest for peace brought the innovative call for a united Europe into the post-war political debates. In that climate, the political idea of a peaceful, federated Europe was born.

The first initiatives had been launched in the inter-war period. These included the 1922 Pan-Europa Movement of Hungarian Europeanist Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi¹ and the 1930 memorandum of Aristide Briand in the League of Nations, which outlined the idea for a European federation of states.² Both initiatives failed with the emergence of Fascism and Nazism in Europe. A new impetus for a peaceful and federated Europe came with a manifesto written in 1941 by a group of Italian anti-

1 Coudenhove-Kalergi published his book, *Pan-Europa* in 1923. His organisation still exists today as the International Pan-European Union. For more information, see *PanEurope*, ‘Paneurope – The Parent Idea of a United Europe’.

2 Aristide Briand’s *Memorandum on the Organization of a Regime of European Federal Union* was selected by the European Parliament as one of the ‘100 Books on Europe to Remember’. See European Parliament, ‘The 100 Books’.

Fascists confined on the island of Ventotene: Altiero Spinelli, Ernesto Rossi, Eugenio Colorni and, with them, Ursula Hirschmann and Ada Rossi.³ At their side, members of the French Resistance, including actors such as Henry Frenay and Alexandre Marc, became the promoters for a new peaceful and united Europe.

The new European federalist movements came together at The Hague Congress of 1948. The congress convened 800 representatives from all kinds of pro-European movements—attendees included Winston Churchill, Alcide De Gasperi, Georges Bidault, Léon Blum and Konrad Adenauer. The meeting produced the first concrete results: the creation of the Council of Europe and the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which was secured by the establishment of a new Court of Justice on Fundamental Rights in Strasbourg. Nonetheless, the notion of peace was not a specific topic of discussion at the Congress. The three main committees dealt with economic, social and cultural questions and not with issues around securing peace in Europe.⁴

The Schuman Plan: an innovative approach to securing peace

As enthusiasm for the intergovernmental Council of Europe soon faded due to the blocking of political action through the unanimity prerogative, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman proposed a new supranational and functional approach, which had been developed by Jean Monnet. Five years after the end of the Second World War, on 9 May 1950, Schuman proclaimed a project to pool French and German coal and steel resources under a supranational leadership as a way to bring long-lasting peace to the two nations and eventually to the whole continent. The pooling of resources and the de facto solidarity created by the new Community would make war in Europe not only

3 See the appendix for a list of the archival holdings mentioned in this text. These include the private archives of Spinelli and Rossi, which are available at the HAEU. A facsimile of the 1943 version of the Manifesto is available at HAEU, 'Projets et correspondance à propos du fédéralisme'.

4 On the Congress of The Hague 1948, see J.-M. Guieu and C. Le Dréau (eds.), *Le 'Congrès de l'Europe' à La Haye (1948–2008)* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2009).

unthinkable but even materially impossible. The offer permitted Germany, for the first time after the end of the war, to return to the international political sphere as an equal partner.⁵

But while the vision expressed in the Schuman Declaration was to secure peace, the topic of peace itself was not an outstanding element in the political workings of the new set of organisations created with the Paris Treaty of 18 April 1951. Furthermore the High Authority, the Court of Justice, the Common Assembly and the Council of Ministers did not have specific directorates, units, working groups or taskforces that included peace in their titles, nor did they launch specific initiatives that would focus on peace in their strategic objectives. The classical measures for ensuring peace, such as disarmament and the implementation of international jurisdiction, arbitration and mediation were not part of the operational tools and methods of the ECSC, nor did they become part of the workings of the two Communities established with the Rome Treaties in 1957 – the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom).

The importance that the Schuman Declaration placed on securing peace in Europe stood in stark contrast to the absence of concrete actions for peace in the workings of the High Authority and the other institutions of the European Communities. This disparity is clearly reflected in the absence of specific archival collections on peace in the archives of the three European Communities preserved at the HAEU. It could be argued that at the moment of birth of the Communities, peace was guaranteed in Europe through NATO and the Western Union under the leadership of the US, while the aim of securing peace served as overarching ideal in the 1951 and 1957 treaty negotiations, rather than as a concrete goal of the Communities themselves.

From peace to defence: the Cold War

A new discussion on peace emerged following the advent of the Cold War and the matter of German rearmament shortly after the signing of the Paris Treaty in 1951. Jean Monnet, following the European step-by-step functional approach, proposed the creation of a common European Defence Community (EDC) to French Prime

5 EU, 'Schuman Declaration May 1950' (n.d.).

Minister Pleven.⁶ In this regard, peace was considered from a defensive perspective, as a way to protect the members of the EDC through a common foreign policy and a joint military force against potential aggression from the Soviet Union and its satellite states. This new vision of peace was quite a distortion of the original peace leitmotiv of the 1950 Schuman Declaration.

The archives covering the EDC negotiations—as well as the related negotiations on the proposed European Political Community—provide an insight into the argument that peace was interpreted as defence from external threats in the context of the Cold War. The EDC was negotiated directly between the governments of the six member states, and therefore no central archival collection of negotiations is present in the HAEU's holdings. However, the accompanying project of creating a European Political Community is well documented in the holdings of the Ad Hoc Assembly that prepared the treaty project for this Community within the Common Assembly of the ECSC, under the chairmanship of Paul-Henri Spaak. The 184 files of the Ad Hoc Assembly were dispersed between the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, but ultimately reunited as one collection by the European Parliament's Archives Service, before being digitised and deposited at the HAEU for public online access. The collection contains a series of documents produced by the constitutional committee and its four sub-committees, and the draft treaty for the supranational political union. The final treaty was approved by the Ad Hoc Assembly on 10 March 1953, but after the non-ratification of the EDC by the French National Assembly the project was dropped. Its documentation survives in the archives of the Ad-Hoc Assembly (see Appendix).

While no central archives exist on the negotiations for the EDC Treaty, the HAEU includes various personal papers and collections that refer to the negotiations during the period 1952–4. Two collections of Jean Monnet's correspondence, the Jean Monnet American Sources and the Jean Monnet Duchêne Sources, broadly document the EDC negotiations with both the European and US partners and governmental

6 On the EDC, see 'European Defense and Political Unity: The Lessons From the Failure of the European Defence Community (1954)', Special Issue, *L'Europe en formation* 395/2 (2022).

representatives, as well as the foundation of the Western European Union (WEU) after the failure of the EDC. The personal papers of Fernand Dehousse also mention the EDC and the WEU, this time from the point of view of the Belgian Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste) and the Socialist Movement for the United States of Europe. The papers of Ivan Matteo Lombardo, who played a key part in the EDC negotiations within the delegation of the Italian Foreign Ministry, document the various phases of negotiations. Finally, the papers of Paul-Henri Spaak give an insight into his participation in the EDC discussions, his leadership of the European Political Community negotiations and his later role as Secretary General of NATO.

From détente to the Common Security and Defence Policy

With the failure of the EDC treaty, the matter of securing peace in Europe was absent from the political debate within the European Communities for a long time and only returned with the first attempts of the member states to coordinate their external relations through European Political Cooperation in the 1970s. The negotiations on détente, and the participation of the European Communities in the framework of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in the period 1973–5, brought the topic of peace back to the attention of the Communities. Moreover, the Directorate-General of the European Commission for External Relations dealt with the resolution of conflicts and establishment of peace when it concerned countries outside the Communities, particularly those that had association or pre-accession status. As such, the independence wars of the former Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique between the early 1960s and the fall of the Salazar regime in 1974, the conflict over Cyprus between Greece and Turkey in 1974, and the series of conflicts that arose from the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s are documented in the archives of the Directorate-General of External Relations and in the documents that were tabled for discussion during the weekly Commission meetings (see Appendix).

Often, these documents were reactions to oral or written questions posed by

Members of the European Parliament, which are preserved in the respective archives of the European Parliament. The elected European Parliament, through its tool of oral and written questions, was particularly active in calling for the Commission and the Council to take action in the quest for peace and conflict resolution around the globe. The European Parliament archives also contain numerous reports, mostly drawn up by its Committee for Political Affairs and External Relations, that refer to conflicts, peace settlements and emergency aid activities during conflicts. Finally, the archives of the Council of the EU include files on negotiations for associations or accessions that sporadically refer to conflicts and peace settlements. These documents are present either in the holdings on negotiations or in the series on External Relations or Relations with Third Countries in the Council archives.

Nonetheless, the maintenance of peace, through its interpretation in security and defence policies, was managed by the Western Union, created with the Brussels Treaty of 1948, and its successor organisation, formed in 1954, the WEU. It integrated the newly rearmed countries of Germany and Italy and operated under NATO. The archival legacy of the WEU, which dealt with most of the conflicts, peace settlements, and defence and security issues that concerned Europe, was split between two archival institutions after the winding up of operations and the integration of its previous activities into the EU in 2011. The archives of the Secretariat General and the Council of the WEU were deposited at the National Archives of Luxembourg; an index for the 3,400 documents dating from 1947 to 2009 has been available online since 2017. The archives of the Assembly of the WEU were deposited at the HAEU in Florence; an index for the 2,917 files is available online.

The question of peace, once again interpreted in terms of defence and security policy, arose again among the Communities with the preparation of the 1986 Single European Act under the new Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Before the CFSP became part of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, it was intellectually reflected on both within and outside the institutional framework. In particular, the independent Cassiodore reflection group, established by Jean-Marie Soutou and Joseph Rovin, was very active in this regard. The group was formed in 1984 with the aim of analysing

the perestroika of Gorbachev and its potential implications for an end to the Cold War and the prospects for a new order in Europe. Various files in the personal papers of Émile Noël, then secretary general of the European Commission and later president of the European University Institute, and further documents in the papers of Pascal Lamy, head of the Delors cabinet at the European Commission, give us an insight into the deliberations of this working group.

During the negotiations for German reunification following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the topic of peace and reconciliation once again became relevant in European affairs. The European Commission under President Jacques Delors was active in the mediation between the French and the German governments over the preparations for reunification. In addition, after the Mediterranean enlargement, which brought Greece (in 1981), Portugal and Spain (in 1985) into the European Communities, the papers of Commission official Angel Viñas shed light on the development of the CFSP, with a special focus on peace and reconciliation in Latin America, which was Viñas's responsibility as director for Asian and Latin American affairs. Later Viñas served as head of the European Commission delegation to the UN, dealing with various global peace and human rights issues.

A specific security and defence policy, along with competences in the area of peace-keeping, entered into the policies of the EU in 1999 during the Cologne European Council, and the new European Security and Defence Policy was integrated into the Lisbon Treaty in 2007. This led to the eventual winding up of the WEU in 2011, while Europe continued to remain under the military shield of NATO and the leadership of the US. Foreign policy, defence and peace-keeping issues continued to mostly be discussed on the intergovernmental level within the Council of the EU, despite the creation, as part of the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty, of the Office of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who, since 2011, has also been in charge of the European External Action Service.

Securing peace in Europe: a dynamic division of labour

During the decades that followed the Second World War, there was a division of labour between various international and regional organisations, on the one hand, and the European Communities, on the other. Of course, responsibilities also moved from organisation to organisation. The Council of Europe and its European Court of Human Rights, the Organisation of European Economic Co-operation (now the OECD), the European Free Trade Association, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the European Space Agency have all had a share in the common mission of securing peace and security in Europe. Some, such as the European Space Agency and the European Free Trade Association have deposited their archives in Florence, and the documents can be consulted in the reading room of the HAEU at Villa Salviati. Other organisations, such as the Council of Europe, manage their own archives and make these available for researchers. The OECD archives were, for a number of years, temporarily deposited in Florence. HAEU archivists prepared the archival index and when the files went back to a new purpose-built archive in Paris, digitised copies of the Organisation of European Economic Co-operation collection remained in Florence. These can be accessed via the HAEU online database.

It seems that for decades peace did not play a prominent role in the workings of the institutions of the European Communities. However, it did play a specific role in those bottom-up societal activities that formed an important part of European civic integration. Peace and reconciliation were the basic principles underlying the many twinning and networking projects between European cities and regions organised by the European Council of Municipalities and Regions and other organisations, in particular as regards post-war Franco-German reconciliation. The reports on these meetings between the French and German municipal representatives and citizens give a unique account of how reconciliation actually worked on the ground. A series of 57 files in the European Council of Municipalities and Regions archives deals with twinning.

The role of the archives

As the official home to the historical documents of the EU institutions, bodies and agencies, the HAEU hosts more than 300 institutional and private archival deposits. The institutional holdings cover all EU institutions that have surpassed 30 years of operations and are, therefore, obliged to open their archives to the public and transfer them to Florence for preservation and public access purposes. Numerous individuals, associations, movements and intergovernmental organisations that have had an impact on European integration have also deposited their archives in Florence. These private holdings comprise documents from the political groups of the European Parliament, European federalist movements, the European Space Agency, the European Free Trade Association, the European Cultural Foundation and many more. The personal papers of individuals cover politicians, high-level EU-officials and federalists, such as those of former Italian prime minister Alcide de Gasperi and Belgian prime minister Paul-Henri Spaak; Commission presidents Walter Hallstein, Francois-Xavier Ortoli, Jacques Delors and Romano Prodi; and federalists Altiero Spinelli and Alexandre Marc. Established as part of the European University Institute on the legal basis of Council Regulation 354/83, the Archives opened its doors to the public in late 1985.⁷

In the past 40 years, the holdings have grown continuously to reach their current 10,000 linear metres of shelving, comprising 800,000 paper files. In addition, the collection contains 1,000 oral history interviews; 80,000 photos, videos and audio recordings; films; posters; building plans; and geographical maps, all of which not only complement the textual documentation but are historical resources of their own. All indexes to the archival documents are available online in the HAEU's database, along with numerous digital documents and audio-visual items on a dedicated digital platform. The most recent amendment to Council Regulation 354/83, from 2015,⁸

7 European Council Regulation (EEC, Euratom) no. 354/83 concerning the opening to the public of the historical archives of the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community, OJ L43 (15 February 1983), 1.

8 European Council Regulation (EU) 2015/496 amending Regulation (EEC, Euratom) no. 354/83 as regards the deposit of the historical archives of the institutions at the European University Institute in

placed a particular focus on providing digital access to the historical archives of EU institutions, prioritising online user services and the digitisation of archival documents. Furthermore, the Archives' mission also includes informing the public about and communicating the history of European integration and the EU and its institutions, as documented in the written memory preserved at Villa Salviati.

Further to the organisation of research activities, the Archives also raises public interest by holding open days and providing civic education programmes for schools and a range of cultural activities. More than 7,000 visitors come to the Archives at Villa Salviati every year. Thematic exhibitions on-site and online complement the regular public history activities of the Archives.

Conclusion

European integration was born as a peace project after the end of the Second World War. During the 75 years since the establishment of the European Communities, peace has been guaranteed amongst the initial 6 and today 27 member states of the EU, and the Union has actively promoted peace globally through its external relations and development cooperation. But while peace was the grand promise of European cooperation and integration, it never became an actual topic for discussion in the EU institutions or other European organisations and it is basically absent as a theme from the archival memory of the EU and European integration. This archival lack of evidence illustrates the broader paradox about how Europeans approached the theme of peace in the process of European integration. With the emergence of the Cold War, the principal aim of peace was gradually redefined as being a matter of defence and security, which moved the discussion away from the maintenance of peace as being the first and primary goal of post-war Europe.

In the multilateral sphere of international organisations, the resolution of conflicts and the creation of peace have been guiding principles, and this is reflected in the preamble to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Constitution of 1945: 'Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences

Florence, OJ L79 (25 March 2015), 1.

of peace must be constructed'.⁹ This was as visionary as the introductory words of the Schuman Declaration of 1950: 'World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it'.¹⁰ Nonetheless, while the UN family has pursued dedicated work on peace throughout its history, the EU has used the notion of peace as a backdrop for its operations rather than as its ultimate goal.

Europeans have for many years relied on a division of labour when it comes to the miracle of ensuring long-lasting peace on the European continent. The EU, like many European organisations, federations and associations, has focused on sectoral debates and the technical and functional steps necessary to integrate Europe. Ensuring peace was defined as a matter for security and defence and, as such, left to the dedicated military organisations of NATO and its European branch, the WEU. This division of labour became obsolete with the end of Cold War, and defence and security slowly entered the remit of the EU, but remained a technical matter of governance, strategies and operations in the field of CSFP, and not a discussion on peace per se.

While today's EU is far from complete, it is suffering internally and externally from the return of nationalism and the threat of national egoism. The missing collective memory, as shown through the absence of discussions of peace in the archival legacy of the European project, makes it difficult for the Union to react to the return of violence on its doorstep. The first wake-up call, the wars following the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, went unheard, with the Union continuing to manage peace as a technical operation under the CSFP. Since Russia embarked on its war against Ukraine, first with the occupation of Crimea in 2014 and the infiltration of the Donbas, and then since 2022 with its full invasion, the subject of peace has returned to the European agenda. However, the EU still struggles to act as an ambitious promotor of peace. Therefore, the topic of peace—not in its interpretation as rearmament in the context of renewed militarisation and defence, but as an operational category itself—will need to be revived and reconsidered as a guide for European unity.

9 UNESCO, Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (1945).

10 EU, 'Schuman Declaration'.

Appendix: HAEU archival holdings cited

	Reference	Hyperlink
European institutions		
European Parliament	Assemblée ad hoc	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/1853?item=AH
European Parliament	Assemblée commune de la CECA – Questions écrites	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/173?item=AC.AP-QP%2FQE
European Parliament	Assemblée parlementaire – Questions parlementaires	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/182682?item=PE0.AP-QP
European Parliament	Questions parlementaires – 1ère législature	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/257577?item=PE1.AP-QP
	2ème législature	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/357781?item=PE2.AP-QP
	3ème législature	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/396505?item=PE3.AP-QP
	4ème législature	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/476789?item=PE4.AP-QP
	5ème législature	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/684509?item=PE5.AP-QP
Council of the EU Accession Negotiations files	CM5/ADH	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/350850?item=CM5/ADH

Council External Relations	CM1 (1952–7)	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/556512?item=CM1.E
European Commission	ECSC High Authority (1952–67)	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/557490?item=CECA_REEX
Directorate-General External Relations	European Economic Community Commission 1958–67	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/824886?item=CCEE_REEX
	Euratom Commission 1958–67	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/533192?item=CEEA_REEX
	European Commission since 1967	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/533276?item=CEUE_REEX
Commission COM and SEC Document series	European Economic Community 1958–67	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/558473?item=CCEE_SECR-01.01
	European Commission since 1967	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/558491?item=CEUE_SEGE-01.01
Corporate bodies		
WEU records at the National Archives of Luxembourg	Fonds d'organisations internationales/WEU – Western European Union (1947–2009)	https://query.an.etat.lu/Query/archivplansuche.aspx
WEU records at the HAEU	Assembly of Western European Union (WEU)	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/194161?item=WEU
European Free Trade Association		https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/247490?item=EFTA

European Space Agency		https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/115224?item=ESA
Organisation of European Economic Co-operation	Digital copies at the HAEU	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/173448?item=OEEC
Council of Municipalities and Regions records	<i>Jumelages</i> series	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/39624?item=CCRE.C.A-01
Personal papers of individuals		
Fernand Dehousse	Communauté européenne de défense (CED) et Union européenne occidentale (UEO)	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/149638?item=FD.D.E
Pascal Lamy	Réflexions par pays (PLA-1545, PLA-1549 and PLA-1556)	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/670133?item=PLA.08.01.05-02
Ivan Matteo Lombardo	Communauté européenne de Défense (CED)	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/154135?item=IML.A-03
Emile Noël	Membre d'associations, de jurys . . .	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/110899?item=EN.20-04
Ernesto Rossi	Prison et confino	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/115010?item=ER.B-02.01

Paul-Henri Spaak	ECSC (including EDC and EPC) NATO	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/187957?item=PHS-05 https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/187959?item=PHS-07
Altiero Spinelli	Projets et correspondance à propos du fédéralisme	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/3705?item=AS-3
Angel Viñas		https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/4033?item=AV
Collections		
JMAS collection	Jean Monnet American Sources	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/155137?item=JMAS
JMDS collection	Jean Monnet Duchêne Sources	https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/155387?item=JMDS

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About the author

Dieter Schlenker is the director of the HAEU. Prior to taking this post in 2013, he worked for UNESCO, first as an archivist at the Paris headquarters, then as head of the information and knowledge management unit in Bangkok. Previously, he worked as the records manager at Ford Company Europe in Cologne and at FAO headquarters in Rome. He holds an Archivist Diploma from the Vatican Secret Archives, a Ph.D. in Modern History from the University of Heidelberg, and a Journalism Diploma from the Freie Journalistenschule Berlin. As co-director of the Alcide De Gasperi Centre on European Integration History at the European University Institute and Associate Professor at the Alma Mater Europaea University in Ljubljana, he is involved in research projects and lectures on archival science and on the history of European integration.

From Negative to Positive Peace:

European Integration and the Changing Foundations of Security

Philippe Perchoc

The matter of war and peace in Europe remains the fundamental issue within a geographical space that has, arguably, the highest number of different states per square kilometre in the world. Indeed, as the Czech writer Milan Kundera put it, the European continent has the distinctive feature of combining a maximum of diversity in a minimum of space. Maintaining this space at peace has been, and especially after two world wars, the greatest challenge for Europeans. Yet when we speak of peace, at least one distinction is necessary: the difference between ‘negative peace’ and ‘positive peace’. This distinction was introduced by Johan Galtung,¹ who defined the former as the mere absence of armed conflict and the latter as a cooperative and just state of affairs among states. The combination of the EU and NATO has enabled positive peace to take root among their members on the European continent for nearly 80 years.

Nonetheless, it is now necessary not only to dispel certain preconceived ideas about the reasons behind the transition from negative to positive peace but also to draw some lessons for the future of Europe’s political architecture. To this end, the argument will proceed in three stages: first, by revisiting Europe’s period of negative peace; then, by examining the positive peace that began in 1991; and finally, by discussing the future of peace on our continent.

Negative peace as the initial driving factor in the process of Western European integration (1945–91)

It is probably necessary to dispel a few misconceptions about the foundations of European integration in the immediate post-war period. To begin with, the war did not end overnight on the Continent: it continued for many months in the form of anti-Communist guerrilla warfare in Eastern Europe and a civil war in Greece. Violence also persisted long after the end of major military operations, as Lowe reminds us when he describes the rapid descent into anarchy after 1945.² We often imagine

1 J. Galtung, ‘Violence, Peace, and Peace Research’, *Journal of Peace Research* 6/3 (1969).

2 K. Lowe, *Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II* (New York: Picador, 2013).

the post-war period as a time of reconciliation when it was at least as much, if not more so, a time of retribution.

Nevertheless, the Second World War was quickly followed by the tensions and eventual crystallisation between 1945 and 1948 of what would become the Cold War. In this context, negative peace between the former Allies was necessary to prepare for the confrontation with the Soviet Union and the states it had brought under its control or annexed. This negative peace provided the necessary condition for positive peace to appear.

Today we tend to imagine the early stages of European integration as a period during which the European nation-states, emerging from the Second World War, joined forces to put war behind them. This is a retrospective construction that overlooks two important dimensions: first, that the states emerging from the war were, for the most part, not yet nation-states and became so through European integration; and second, that all this took place in the context of both the Cold War and the American security guarantee.

Some of today's political parties claim that they want to restore Europe's nation-states, setting this goal in opposition to European integration. But as Timothy Snyder has repeatedly noted, most of the venerable European nation-states have never existed.³ In 1951, five of the six founding states of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) were empires, operating actively in Africa or Asia or having recently been active there. Germany had just failed to establish a European empire. The founding states were not, strictly speaking, nation-states confined to their European borders.⁴ They became European nation-states within the framework of European integration, which coincided with decolonisation.

At the same time that they redefined themselves as nation-states, the countries of Europe gradually became 'member states', as European integration deepened

3 T. Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* (New York: Crown, 2018).

4 France even had a territory outside Europe, Algeria. M. Brown, *The Seventh Member State: Algeria, France, and the European Community* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2022).

and widened. In other words, as Christopher Bickerton argues,⁵ they jointly defined frameworks that enabled them to govern themselves, not only through the nation-state but also through European integration. National policies were co-produced in part, and sometimes largely, by the member states in Brussels. And integration enabled states to regain sovereignty collectively after 1945.

Of course, some states became post-colonial nation-states in Europe without European integration. These include Spain and Portugal, though both clung to their empires for a long time, and the UK, which quickly joined the integration process. Ireland and Denmark stand somewhat apart in this respect. The Federal Republic of Germany is an interesting case, having been profoundly reshaped after 1945 and then redefined as a nation-state through European integration.

But most Western European states were redefined both as nation-states and as member states within the framework of European integration. Once this dynamic began, what Luuk van Middelaar has called ‘un espace tiers’ (a third space)⁶ emerged, in which the spheres of domestic and international politics are intertwined. Europe provided a framework in which states would stabilise themselves in the post-colonial and Cold War context, cooperate, redefine themselves as member states and co-produce member-statehood.

From this point of departure, Western European states gradually became each other’s ‘alter egos’, neither fully united in a federal state nor fully isolated within the international system. In the light of this, Jacques Delors’s formulation, a ‘Federation of Nation States’,⁷ should probably be reinterpreted: European integration co-produced nation-states that are also member states. This is illustrated, for instance, in the way regions that have been tempted to secede from a European country—whether

5 C. J. Bickerton, *European Integration: From Nation-States to Member States* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

6 L. van Middelaar, *Le passage à l'Europe : histoire d'un commencement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012).

7 J. Delors, ‘Discours de Jacques Delors (Bruges, 17 octobre 1989)’, speech made at the opening of the fortieth academic year at the College of Europe in Bruges, *Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe* (website) (2026).

Flanders, Scotland or Catalonia—have factored the European community into their calculations: the EU is now an integral part of the equation.

Yet the conditions that made this negative peace possible are often underestimated today: the end of Europe's colonial empires as well as the rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union. Without this rivalry, the first stage of today's European integration would not have taken the form of negative peace.

Negative peace among Western Europeans owes a great deal to US involvement. This took at least three forms.

The first was NATO. Initially, it should be remembered that the main concern of many Western European states remained protecting themselves from a resurgence of German power. This is why the Treaty of Dunkirk was signed in 1947, uniting the Benelux countries, France and the UK against the German threat. The treaty was later broadened to include protection from the Soviet threat, before the Berlin Blockade triggered discussion on establishing a transatlantic treaty that would provide guarantees of negative peace in Europe.⁸

American pressure also pushed Western Europeans to concentrate on the European dimension of their foreign policies. This became evident when, in 1956, the French and the British believed they could intervene in Suez to defend their interests, only for the US to pressure them into withdrawing.⁹ Thus, alongside offering protection to Western Europe and enabling it to unite, the US exerted pressure to end not only colonisation but also Europe's interventionist ambitions on the global stage¹⁰—at the very moment that the Soviets were invading Hungary.

The second form that US involvement took was the Marshall Plan, which complemented NATO. It enabled European economies to restart, but it also required the participating states to cooperate. They had to harmonise their economic policy

8 J. L. Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (London: Penguin Books, 2007).

9 A. Gorst and L. Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, Routledge Sources in History (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1997).

10 T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Vintage Books, 2010).

objectives and share their production plans. Therefore, two years before the ECSC was established, there was already a mechanism in place that enabled states to cooperate and thus produce public policies in a common framework with the aim of stabilising the continent against Soviet ambitions.

Lastly, the US clearly supported the projects of Jean Monnet and the architects of the ECSC.¹¹ These projects were bolstered both by the American security guarantee for Western Europe—and not only for the countries included in the ECSC at its inception—and by the economic stimulus generated by the Marshall Plan.

European integration and its state-building dynamics must, therefore, be situated within the broader context of both the Soviet threat and the American response to it. US policy in Europe and the creation of a hegemonic framework through NATO established the negative peace. And this, in turn, enabled integration to develop while also allowing the creation of an autonomous and distinctly European framework (the ECSC).¹²

Under the American umbrella, the states of the continent were able to begin perceiving one another as alter egos. Meanwhile, on the other part of the continent, negative peace was forced upon Central and Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union, even through military interventions in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968). Under the control of the Soviets, this gave rise to a very different form of negative peace.

From negative peace to positive peace: the emergence of a European peace community (1991–2022)

The persistence of the framework in which the US protected Western Europe while the Soviet Union threatened it allowed the negative peace to develop into a

11 G. Lundestad, *'Empire' by Integration: The United States and European Integration, 1945–1997* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

12 A. S. Milward, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1945–51* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2003).

more structured context required for positive peace, which is based on enduring institutions. These institutions were not regarded as constraints on sovereignty. It is worth recalling that President de Gaulle, despite practising the policy of the empty chair, never withdrew France from the three European Communities.¹³

The arrival of the ‘unipolar moment’ after the fall of the Berlin Wall created a new context that enabled Europeans to deepen their cooperation in the fields of economic and monetary union, the free movement of people, the single market and the creation of a European citizenship that complemented national citizenships.

It is also important to note that the enlargements of the EU have coincided not only with the continued existence of NATO but also with its enlargement. Indeed, for Central European countries after 1991, the complementarity of the two organisations was self-evident, and NATO membership also had an identity dimension.¹⁴

External reassurance, provided by the US, therefore continued to be a driving factor throughout the 1990s and 2000s, just as the Union embarked on a fundamental shift involving both deepening and widening. For a few of the new member states that joined the Union after 2004, the same process of co-constructing the state through enlargement was at play. Some, like Poland, had remained functional states during the Cold War but needed to radically transform their economic and democratic systems. Others, such as the Baltic states or Slovenia, were finding, or rediscovering, their statehood; and this experience was almost immediately embedded within the process of European integration.

For the states of Central and Eastern Europe, it was absolutely essential that the American guarantee be made tangible through the development of defence plans within NATO as well as the deployment of military assets on the Alliance’s eastern flank. At the same time, and following the terrorist attacks of the early 2000s, the

13 P. G. Cerny, *The Politics of Grandeur: Ideological Aspects of de Gaulle’s Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

14 R. Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

Alliance increasingly focused on out-of-area operations and counterterrorism. Its new members embraced this shift while never losing sight of the importance, for them, of defending Europe against Russia.

The year 2008 marked a turning point for Europeans. They were struck by a major economic crisis originating in the US; the NATO Bucharest Summit took place, which opened the prospect of eventual Ukrainian and Georgian membership of NATO but without providing an action plan; and Russia invaded Georgia.¹⁵

This threefold combination pushed Europeans, particularly those in Central and Eastern Europe, to press much more insistently for strengthened NATO guarantees on the eastern flank, so as to render the American guarantee tangible in the context of the war in Georgia. This demand became even more urgent after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and they finally secured such measures in 2016.

Negative and positive peace in a post-American Europe after 2022

Europe's negative peace was born of the combination of American support and Soviet hostility. It gradually evolved into positive peace, particularly during a period of sustained American backing and the disappearance of the Soviet threat. Will peace in Europe continue in the context of a war initiated by Moscow and uncertainty surrounding the commitment of the US? Negative peace was the condition for positive peace among the states that founded the EU. For some time a state of negative peace existed with Russia, but this came to an end with the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

The period 2020–22 marked a major turning point for European integration. The countries of Europe multiplied their forms of cooperation in the areas of the market, the currency and the coordination of economic policies, thus reinforcing their development as 'member states' in Bickerton's sense. Moreover, they confronted crises, such as

15 R. Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

the eurozone crisis, that strengthened their integration.¹⁶ The Covid crisis brought about another spectacular advance in European integration. Faced with a threat that affected all member states in the same way, they agreed not to borrow in solidarity by means of an external vehicle outside the EU budget, as they had done during the eurozone crisis, but to borrow as the EU, using the Union's own budget as collateral. This joint borrowing represents a clear instance of joint European sovereignty. Barely two years later, this unity in the face of an invisible enemy was tested by the invasion of Ukraine by a visible foe.

This external shock caught Europeans by surprise. Donald Trump's first presidency had revealed the possibility of American disengagement, a prospect that had already come to light when Barack Obama was president. It is true that Joe Biden's presence in the White House reassured Europeans of strong American support both for Ukraine and, through NATO, for Europe. Nevertheless, doubts lingered in many European capitals.

In responding to this situation, Europeans were divided. Parts of Central and Baltic Europe immediately supported Ukraine in its defence and sought to mobilise the EU while urging that nothing be done that might prompt American disengagement. By contrast, Western Europe's material support was more measured, though also more realistic regarding the sustainability of American engagement in Europe. Without clear American leadership, Europeans found themselves disunited. The EU was slow in adopting the radical support measures required. It took a long time to decide what equipment to ship to Ukraine, how to support the Ukrainian budget and how to give Kyiv the prospect of solid post-war security guarantees. Nevertheless, every six months member states did vote, unanimously, for sanctions packages; the EU provided essential budgetary support to Ukraine, without which the country would have collapsed; and the Union assumed a major share of the training of Ukrainian troops.

Nevertheless, the expected end of the American umbrella has ultimately convinced

16 L. van Middelaar, *Alarums and Excursions: Improvising Politics on the European Stage*, trans. L. Waters (Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing, 2019).

Europeans that they must transform their positive peace into defence capability, so as to be able to secure negative peace with Russia. While the areas of cooperation among member states continue to expand, from the Covid response to budgetary solidarity, the issue now touches the very heart of state sovereignty: security and defence.

Yet in these domains, too, Europeans increasingly seem to understand that if they can no longer count on the US to protect their sovereignty, they must protect it together at the European level. The NATO states that are not EU members also recognise this today: Norwegians and Britons are drawing closer to Brussels and even seeking participation in European instruments in this area. Conversely, the EU member states most critical of the Union, such as Hungary and Slovakia, are not moving towards exiting it and have not completely blocked the Union's progress in the field of defence.

Conclusion

The role of the US in the processes of European integration is often underestimated. Yet it was absolutely essential in the slow transformation of European states to become each other's alter egos, rather than parts of a federal state or entirely isolated from one another.

However, this role is now changing. As an ally primarily concerned with its own interests, the US can no longer be seen as a power willing to defend Europe at any cost. This means that the cost of defence must now shift to Europeans, who have to find the mechanisms necessary both to establish a relationship of mutual interest with Washington and to build an autonomous capacity for self-defence.

Today, at least three threats may materialise. The first is that, under the current presidency or the next one, American forces might rapidly withdraw from Europe and more generally, that the US might reduce its level of solidarity, including nuclear solidarity. This would leave Europeans at the mercy of a Russian attack on the eastern flank.

The second threat is that of a Russo-American rapprochement at Europe's expense. The current negotiations between Moscow and Washington may bear some resemblance to this, driven by an American attempt to detach Russia from China.

A third threat, rarely discussed by Europeans, is that of a chaotic transition in Moscow. It is often assumed that the Russian regime is extraordinarily stable, but no regime exists forever. Whether it comes about through a coup, like the one attempted by Yevgeny Prigozhin in 2023, or through the physical decline or sudden death of the Russian president, the transition could be highly chaotic, creating opportunities for Europeans but above all uncertainty over the attitudes of Washington and Beijing.

In all these scenarios Europeans can only influence events and be useful allies to Washington if they are able to demonstrate their added value. And that value is defined by their capacity to defend themselves. They managed to transform negative peace on the continent into positive peace among themselves. Now the challenge is to ensure that a just negative peace reigns in their neighbourhood.

For a long time, Europeans believed that their history and integration made them the vanguard of a global movement, yet today they are discovering that they are probably an exception. This distinctiveness must be defended, and this can only be done by Europeans themselves.

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About the author

Philippe Perchoc is the director of the *Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'Ecole Militaire (IRSEM) Europe*, the Brussels campus of the think tank of the French Ministry of Armed Forces. He holds a doctorate in political science from the Paris Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po), where he defended his thesis on Baltic foreign and defence policies after the collapse of the USSR.

Part II – European Peace as a Political, Social and Institutional Order

Political Traditions and European Integration:

How the Christian Democratic, Socialist
and Liberal Cultures Converged on the
Narrative of Peace Through Cooperation
and Shared Values

Jacopo Cellini

The polarity and continuous struggle between nationalism and universalism has been a defining feature of the contemporary world, originating in the revolutions of the late eighteenth century. Competing visions of a world order—dominated either by the power of nations or by international cooperation—have shaped global politics and defined the public discourse on war and peace, particularly since the late nineteenth century. Europe played a pivotal role in the development of these competing visions, as the establishment of the nation-state and the idea of an international community governed by international law evolved in parallel within the European political and cultural space.¹

The creation of international organisations dedicated to promoting political, economic and cultural cooperation among nations was central to liberal internationalism. This vision gained significant, though short-lived, momentum after the First World War through the establishment of the League of Nations. Similar universalist ideals were also promoted by other worldviews that were oriented towards a communitarian social order, such as the Christian culture interpreted politically by European Christian Democracy. Socialists likewise advocated for a world order based on peace and justice, though they believed its realisation required the unity of workers across nations and the revolutionary overcoming of the mystified peace imposed by capitalist and imperialist domination—a view that was moderated by the democratic and reformist approach of Social Democracy.

All these political cultures, which would play a prominent role in the process of European integration after the Second World War, shared an internationalist background and a general vision of a world order that valued peace and cooperation over antagonism and nationalism. They were not immune to intersections with nationalist culture—the First World War being the most evident and tragic example—and they did not dismiss the importance of nation-states as the basic institutional units of the international system and as powerful sources of identity-building. At the same time, their preference for supranational forms of aggregation was rooted in the philosophical traditions that

1 A. Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

underpinned their political engagement and served to counterbalance the influence of an inward-looking, nation-based approach.

This chapter argues that the common universalist values shared by the Christian Democratic, socialist and liberal political traditions helped to sustain cooperative practices within the newly formed European institutions. Moreover, these values fostered convergence around the idea of Europe as a project of peace, founded on democracy, respect for human rights and solidarity. In this chapter, drawing on the discourse of the three political cultures, peace is understood as a multilayered concept, encompassing both the absence of war and a broader political and cultural project based on institutionalised cooperation.

Federalism and European integration

During and immediately after the Second World War, a transnational movement of federalists promoted the idea of a united Europe as being the only viable path to lasting peace and the eradication of nationalist toxins in European societies. They redirected the discourse on Europe away from the racist and totalitarian connotations of Nazi propaganda, offering instead a vision of continental political integration within a peaceful and cooperative international community. These principles were first articulated in the *Ventotene Manifesto*, drafted in 1941 by anti-fascist militants Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi while exiled on the Mediterranean island of Ventotene: ‘Once the demarcation of the Old Continent is superseded, and all of humanity is united in one common design, it will become increasingly obvious that the European Federation is the only conceivable guarantee for peaceful cooperation in American–Asian relations, awaiting a more distant future when global political unity might become a reality’.²

The socialist and revolutionary elements of the *Ventotene Manifesto*, reflecting the intellectual background of its authors, were not universally shared within the federalist

2 The English version of the *Ventotene Manifesto*, from which we quote—along with the French, German, Spanish, Greek and Arabic versions—is available online. See A. Spinelli, E. Rossi and E. Colorni, *The Ventotene Manifesto* (22 August 1944), trans. Union of European Federalists.

movement. Conservatives, for instance, emphasised the revival of a ‘European family’ rooted in the continent’s shared past—one whose cultural ties predated the nation-state and whose political expression would take the form of a European union or federation founded on human rights and the rule of law.³ Almost all strands of European federalism gathered in The Hague, the Netherlands, in May 1948, under the auspices of the International Committee of the Movements for European Unity (later renamed the European Movement). More than 700 participants—politicians, parliamentarians, entrepreneurs and intellectuals, predominantly men but also a few women—from 17 European countries debated the path towards European unity. The compromise reached among the various positions represented at the Congress of Europe ultimately favoured an intergovernmental approach over a fully federal one, and therefore did not entail any significant transfer of sovereignty to the supranational level.⁴

The outcome of this endeavour was the establishment, one year later, of the Council of Europe.⁵ The signatories, ‘convinced that the pursuit of peace based upon justice and international co-operation is vital for the preservation of human society and civilisation’, declared that the aim of this new international organisation was to ‘achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress.’⁶ On a parallel institutional path, this objective was also central to the political project of the European Communities, initiated by the Schuman Declaration.

3 M. Duranti, *The Conservative Human Rights Revolution: European Identity, Transnational Politics, and the Origins of the European Convention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

4 J.-M. Guieu and C. Le Dréau (eds.), *Le ‘Congrès de l’Europe’ à La Haye (1948–2008)* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2009).

5 B. Wassenberg, *History of the Council of Europe. 75 Years of European Co-operation* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2024).

6 See Council of Europe, *Statute of the Council of Europe* (London, 5 May 1949).

The Schuman Declaration and the launch of the European Communities

In May 1950 French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman's declaration—which proposed the joint management of coal and steel production by France and Germany within an organisation open to the participation of other European countries—set in motion the process that would lead, in April 1951, to the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the first of the European Communities. The path eventually taken by European integration was neither the only possible one, nor the most predictable. Other institutions, such as the Council of Europe and the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation, pursued alternative approaches to promoting cooperation among European countries after the Second World War, within the broader context of the Cold War. While the former, as discussed above, stemmed from federalist movements, the latter was founded in 1948 to manage the funds of the Marshall Plan and later became a forum for Western cooperation and the coordination of development aid.⁷ In the long run, however, it was the functionalist strategy proposed by Schuman—on the initiative of Jean Monnet and his collaborators—that proved most successful. This approach sought to achieve European unity on supranational foundations through a gradual, sector-based process beginning with the economic sphere.

Historical scholarship has long challenged the idealistic narrative promoted by European institutions and sympathetic authors, emphasising instead that economic and intergovernmental dynamics have largely dominated the process of integration.⁸ Nevertheless, this should not lead to an underestimation of the cultural roots of the European project as it developed from the early 1950s onward. The Schuman

7 M. Leimgruber and M. Schmelzer (eds.), *The OECD and the International Political Economy Since 1948* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).

8 For a literature overview, see B. Leucht, K. Seidel and L. Warlouzet, 'Interpretations of European Integration History and Introduction to Research Tools', in B. Leucht, K. Seidel and L. Warlouzet (eds.), *Reinventing Europe: The History of the European Union, 1945 to the Present* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023).

Declaration began by asserting that world peace could not be safeguarded ‘without the making of creative efforts’, and it outlined a roadmap for the future: ‘the pooling of coal and steel production should immediately provide for the setting up of common foundations for economic development as a first step in the federation of Europe and will change the destinies of those regions which have long been devoted to the manufacture of munitions of war, of which they have been the most constant victims’.⁹ The creation of the ECSC was thus presented as an effort to eliminate the very possibility of war between European nations—an objective that could ultimately be secured through a European federation.

At the same time, peace became inextricably linked with security in the context of the Cold War. Transatlantic relations with the US, within the framework of the Atlantic Alliance, provided the external security umbrella under which Western Europe could pursue economic and political integration. However, efforts to establish a common European defence and to accelerate progress towards a federal union failed when the French Parliament rejected the Treaty establishing a European Defence Community in 1954. In the text of the treaty, the signatories had agreed to contribute to the maintenance of peace, **‘considering that the most complete possible integration, to the extent compatible with military necessities, of the human and material elements that their defence forces assemble within the framework of a supranational European organisation, is the best means to achieve this goal with all the necessary speed and efficiency’**.¹⁰ This federal objective was pursued in later years, particularly within the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Communities (renamed the European Parliament in 1962), which became the key arena for confrontation and dialogue among the various political cultures.

9 EU, ‘Schuman Declaration’ (May 1950).

10 Treaty establishing the European Defence Community (Paris, 27 May 1952), Preamble, accessed at http://www.cvce.eu/obj/traite_instituant_la_communaute_europeenne_de_defense_paris_27_mai_1952-fr-2af9ea94-7798-4434-867a-36c4a256d0af.html. Translated by the author from the original French.

Cooperation in the Parliament and convergence over a shared narrative

While the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the oldest international parliamentary body based on an intergovernmental treaty, was established in 1949, the project of European integration outlined in the Schuman Declaration did not originally envisage a parliamentary dimension. This element was added later in the ECSC Treaty, which created a Common Assembly with consultative powers. In 1953 the appointed representatives decided to form political groups along ideological rather than national lines, thus founding the Christian Democratic Group, the Socialist Group, and the Group of Liberals and Allies. These political groups quickly developed a shared interest in institutionalising their role within the Common Assembly and enhancing its powers within the broader European institutional framework.¹¹

Following the signing of the Treaties of Rome in 1957, the expansion of the Communities was accompanied by the broadening and consolidation of parliamentary activity.¹² This evolution strengthened cooperation among the various political groups, which increasingly sought to establish common positions and collective strategies to reinforce the Parliament's otherwise limited bargaining power. Such cooperation was encouraged by the tendency of the groups to select pro-European representatives—many of whom held federalist convictions—and by the growing commitment of the Socialist and Liberal groups to the cause of European integration from the early 1960s onward. The Christian Democrats, meanwhile, had demonstrated a steady pro-European orientation from the very beginning, grounded in their experience of post-war transnational party collaboration.¹³

Ideological differences notwithstanding, then, the three political traditions were

11 L. Bardi and J. Cellini, *Interparty Relations in the European Parliament 1952–2024: Between Cooperative and Adversarial Politics*, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies (Brussels, 2024).

12 See also the contribution by Alfredo De Feo in this volume.

13 L. Bonfreschi, G. Orsina and A. Varsori (eds.), *European Parties and the European Integration Process, 1945–1992* (Brussels: Peter Lang: 2015).

able to find common ground in a shared vision for the future of European integration. One of the key elements of this vision was the idea of Europe as a project of peace founded on democracy, respect for human rights and solidarity. The emphasis on the link between peace and security in the face of external threats was coupled with a focus on Europe's role as a stabilising force in the international community—both in East–West relations and in the development of the Global South. This narrative was reflected in the political programmes of the Federation of Liberal and Democratic Parties in the European Community, the Confederation of the Socialist Parties of the European Community and the European People's Party (EPP) for the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979. The Liberals articulated the goal of developing a common foreign policy 'based on the principles of liberty, democracy, self-determination, on the ideals of solidarity and respect for the rule of law, on the maintenance of peace'.¹⁴ The Socialists expressed the intent to 'promote peace, security and cooperation', asserting that 'freedom, justice, and solidarity are not merely principles upheld in our various countries; they also serve as our guiding values for the new world economic order that we wish to establish'.¹⁵ The EPP Group, for its part, declared that 'only by joint action can Europe safeguard its own personality (its identity), its right of self-determination, and hence its ideals of freedom, solidarity, justice, peace and democracy'.¹⁶

The role of Christian Democracy

Christian Democracy was a driving force both in the early stages and in subsequent crucial phases of European integration. Scholarship has highlighted how the networks activated by several actors—including the European party network, the political

14 Historical Archives of the European Union, *Le programme libéral ou: un pari sur une Europe libre, responsable et solidaire* (1978), Archive of the Groupe de l'Alliance des démocrates et des libéraux pour l'Europe au Parlement européen, ADLE-1162.

15 Historical Archives of the European Union, *Union des Partis Socialistes de la Communauté Européenne. Appel aux électeurs* (12 January 1979), Archive of the Groupe parlementaire du Parti des socialistes européens, GPSE-725.

16 T. Jansen and S. Van Hecke, *At Europe's Service. The Origins and Evolution of the European People's Party* (Berlin: Springer, 2011), 253–81.

group in the European Parliament, the national parties and the Christian Democratic representatives in the member state governments—were instrumental in advancing decisions and strategies at key moments in the integration process (such as the period surrounding the signing of the Maastricht Treaty).¹⁷ Less studied, and at times dismissed, however, has been the role of Christian Democratic political culture in shaping the broader narrative of European integration.

Born in the late nineteenth century as an anti-liberal and anti-socialist movement championing religious interests in society, Christian Democracy underwent a profound transformation during the twentieth century. By the post-Second World War period, it had emerged as a supporter of liberal democracy, reconciled with the Christian conception of the human person and of society.¹⁸ In the view of its leading figures, the political culture of Christian Democracy could serve as a bridge between various intellectual traditions, providing a shared foundation for the idea of Europe and its political realisation. The Italian statesman Alcide De Gasperi expressed this vision before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which he had been appointed to chair, only a few months before his death in 1954: ‘Once the necessary precautions to maintain peace have been taken, it must be recognised that the true and solid guarantee of our union lies in an architectural vision capable of shaping its structure from the foundation to the summit’. Only dialogue among the great currents of thought that had shaped European history—liberalism, Social Democracy and Christian culture—could ‘help to create this idea and to foster its free and progressive development’.¹⁹

The idea of Europe as a project of peace and security, and as a factor of balance

17 W. Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); L. Bardi et al., *The European Ambition. The European People's Party Group and European Integration* (Baden Baden: Nomos, 2020).

18 C. Invernizzi Accetti, *What Is Christian Democracy? Politics, Religion and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

19 A. De Gasperi, ‘La nostra patria Europa’, speech given at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Paris, 21 April 1954 (author’s translation). See also J. Cellini, *Alcide De Gasperi. La cultura di un politico cattolico* (Rome: Carocci, 2025), 189.

within the international community—committed to the protection of human rights, international cooperation, and the promotion of social justice and development—was upheld by European Christian Democracy in the following decades.²⁰ Its influence on the process of European integration contributed to embedding these principles within the institutional culture of the European Communities and, later, the EU. The Treaty of Lisbon affirms that ‘The Union’s aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples’, and that, in its relations with the wider world, the Union

shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, the eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child, as well as to the strict observance and the development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter.

Conclusions: historical legacies and current challenges

The convergence of the Christian Democratic, socialist and liberal cultures around a shared narrative on peace—its values, and the means to preserve and promote it—was facilitated by their common universalist orientations and federalist preferences, as well as by their practical cooperation within emerging European institutions. Their collaboration in post-war Europe was not merely pragmatic, but reflected a deeper cultural and political alignment grounded in rejection of the totalitarian and nationalist ideologies that had led to the Second World War.

Two critical elements help to frame this process in light of both its historical context and current developments. The first concerns the gap between ideas and their political realisation: the implementation of such a narrative faced not only occasional divergences over priorities and strategies, but also structural constraints arising from the limited powers of the European Communities/EU in the realm of foreign and security policy.

20 J. Cellini, ‘The Idea of Europe at the Origins of the European People’s Party. The Making of the European Manifesto and of the EPP’s Political Programme’, *Journal of European Integration History* 24/1 (2018).

While European integration has been a successful project in terms of maintaining peace among its member states, the EU's capacity to promote peace on the global stage has been significantly affected by the lack of robust political instruments.

The second element has to do with the declining influence of Christian Democracy, socialism and liberalism, and the simultaneous rise of ideological polarisation and nationalist opposition to the EU. Electoral trends point to the overall weakening of the three oldest political groups, while the 'populist surge' that has emerged in many national party systems has also accentuated the conflict between Europeanist and sovereigntist forces at the European level. The mainstream narrative of European integration is increasingly contested by a range of actors both inside and outside European institutions.

At the same time, the composition of European parties has evolved through the inclusion of national parties with diverse cultural and ideological backgrounds, a development that is bound to affect the European parties' core identities and programmatic profiles.²¹ For the leading force in the European Parliament, the EPP, this raises questions about the endurance of its Christian Democratic identity: the incorporation of members from different political traditions may bring about changes to its political agenda and strategic alliances, potentially leading to a reframing of the narrative outlined in this contribution. In particular, its convergence with socialist and liberal cultures, grounded in common universalist premises, may be challenged by a shift towards exclusionary, identitarian narratives that prioritise a defensive notion of peace over cooperation and internationalism.

In a rapidly changing political landscape—marked by international conflicts and a resurgence of nationalist movements and rhetoric—a historical understanding of the intellectual foundations of the idea of 'European peace' may help us to face the current challenges and illuminate possible paths forward.

21 E. Bressanelli, *Europarties After Enlargement. Organization, Ideology and Competition* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

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About the author

Jacopo Cellini is a Research Fellow at the European University Institute and a Visiting Professor at the University of Rome Tor Vergata. His research focuses on the history of European integration and the role of religion in post-Second World War European societies, paying particular attention to the political culture of European Christian Democracy.



The Tools of Peace (I):

A Look at the Treaties

Alain Lamassoure

Within the European framework for peace, there is a visible, well-known and well-documented aspect: the highly pragmatic ‘Monnet method’ of small steps leading to the creation of a virtuous cycle. It is evident in everything from the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) to monetary union; from the foundation in law — international law, and primary and secondary Community law — to the case law of the Court of Justice; in the selection of competences transferred to the Union; and in the originality of the institutions and their architecture. But this iceberg has a submerged aspect that is very little known and has scarcely been studied to date.

Provisions specific to the EU were introduced into the treaties themselves, designed not only with effectiveness in mind, but also with the aim of facilitating relations between institutions, bodies, countries, governments, political parties and individuals. They might be described as ‘peace-friendly’ provisions. We invite readers to take a fresh look at familiar elements of a well-known landscape.

Multilingualism

In the beginning was the word. The EU, which grew out of the European Community, is not a traditional international organisation. It is not enough, for us, simply to understand one another; we must manage to reach agreement. And as there were only six of us at the outset, we established the principle that all national languages were both official languages and working languages. This principle and practice have become the norm quite naturally through successive waves of enlargement. With 27 member states, the Union operates in 24 languages. This means that, in each of the EU institutions, no vote can take place without participants having access to simultaneous interpretation of the debates and a translation of the text under consideration into the language of their choice. This is an absolute necessity in the European Parliament: one cannot expect a representative elected by the people to speak in a language other than that of their constituents. All the more so as the latter must be able to access and understand all the public statements made by their elected representatives.

This distinctive feature sets the EU apart from all other international organisations.

The Council of Europe, the predecessor organisation to the Strasbourg-based body, which is responsible, amongst other things, for promoting multilingualism, has only 2 official languages—French and English—to offer its 47 member states. The 166 members of the WTO make do with English, French and Spanish. With 193 members, the UN operates in just 6 languages: those of its 5 permanent members, plus Arabic. This linguistic regime is generally also applied to its subsidiary organisations. Going even further, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank operate solely in English, whilst deigning to provide simultaneous interpretation into the other UN languages.

Multilingualism is of crucial importance to the European Parliament. It requires interpreters and translators of exceptional calibre. The system is so well-oiled that the linguistic constraints hardly slow down proceedings at all. Thanks to this indispensable facility, every Member of the European Parliament (MEP) experiences ‘unity in diversity’ on a daily basis and instinctively feels on an equal footing with their colleagues. A multinational democracy is made possible.

The vocabulary of peace

The words of the Union’s founding texts were carefully selected. There are sweet-sounding words, bitter-sounding words and very neutral terms: bad taste is to be avoided at all costs. Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) describes European integration as ‘the process of creating an ever closer union amongst the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizens.’ Everyone is free to oppose a closer union of states, but who can oppose a closer union of peoples?

Two important groups of words, though dear to lawyers, have been banished from the treaties to spare certain sensibilities. ‘Federal’, ‘federation’ and ‘federalism’ are taboo in France. Although sovereignty is a concept at the heart of our democratic systems, it does not appear in any European treaty: Europe is being built whilst taking care not to mention this elephant in the room. Supranationalism was proudly invoked

in the first treaty, the ECSC Treaty. Article 8 conferred it upon the High Authority with this caveat: ‘Each Member State undertakes to respect its supranational character.’ The phrase subsequently disappeared, as the word gave rise, here and there, to excessive expectations or fears. The High Authority, which had been the driving and executive body, was reclassified as a modest Commission. The original Parliamentary Assembly was elevated to the status of Parliament when it was elected by universal suffrage—which is a source of pride for citizens—but the term ‘government’ is reserved for the member states. The person responsible for the Union’s external affairs is, for the time being, merely a high representative.

This does not mean that all terminology choices have been successful. The architects of the European Council unfortunately overlooked the existence of the Council of Europe, causing discouraging confusion for the general public and for journalists in a hurry. The term ‘president’ is applied to several different roles, whilst the Union has no true European president. Replacing ‘Community’ with ‘Union’ had the drawback of abandoning an innovative term—one that aptly captured the original spirit of a family of peoples—in favour of a very commonplace word. But the real counter-example to this wise self-discipline in toning down legal vocabulary was provided by the unfortunate use of the adjective ‘constitutional’ to describe the treaty that was ultimately rejected by popular vote in the Netherlands and France in May 2005. The ‘No’ campaigners feared the label even more than the content. Let us avoid words that cause offence!

The locations

What criteria should have been applied when choosing the seats of the European institutions? Symbols, the pursuit of efficiency, national pride or even personal convenience? In establishing its places of work, the Union sought, above all, to avoid upsetting any of the major countries or alarming others. As a result, we ended up with a three-headed institution: Brussels, home to the European Commission and the main venue for meetings of national governments—ambassadors, ministers and the European Council; Strasbourg, the official seat of the Parliament; and Luxembourg,

the legal and financial capital, housing the Court of Justice, the Court of Auditors and the European Investment Bank Group. When it came to choosing the seat of the European Central Bank (ECB), no one could dispute the choice of Frankfurt, the financial capital of the prestigious Deutsche Mark, of which the euro was intended to be the successor.

This division of roles was widely accepted by governments and public opinion. Members from the eastern part of the continent pointed out that EU expansion resulted in Brussels no longer being centrally located within the Union, but the search for a more central city would have divided the former countries of the 'Middle Kingdom', once under the Habsburg crown. The division of the Parliament's working locations between Brussels and Strasbourg is a source of irritation in terms of MEPs' personal convenience and an unfortunate strain on public finances, but the value of a symbol of reconciliation such as the city of Strasbourg is not disputed by anyone. And, here again, to consider another historical example would lead to a contest of martyrdom into which no one dares to venture.

Rivalries, which exist even amongst the founding member states, are defused in other ways. The development of European policies has led to the creation of new joint administrative bodies. Half a dozen executive agencies, responsible for managing the European Commission's programmes, are based in Brussels. However, those with their own regulatory powers are intended to be decentralised. Around 40 such agencies have been set up to date, and their growth rate shows no sign of slowing. This ensures not only that each member state hosts at least one, but also that cities other than national capitals are given a chance to host them: Parma, Bilbao, Amsterdam, Angers, Cologne, Thessaloniki and so on.

Admittedly, these locations do not meet the best scientific or economic criteria. The choice of medium-sized towns poorly served by low-cost rapid transport cannot always be described as optimal. But the adoption of a European identity can also be achieved through this kind of dispersal.

Ultimately, Europe has three political capitals, a financial capital, dozens of cities

hosting agency headquarters . . . and no centre! That is what matters most. Brussels is prominent enough to lend its name to the anonymous power of the Union, but the circle of 12 stars on the common flag has a centre everywhere and a circumference nowhere.

The vast spectrum of diversity

It is interesting to note that the TEU first and foremost celebrates diversity, taking great care to assure member states that the key elements of their national identity will under no circumstances be called into question. The following excerpts have been gleaned from the Treaty.

Article 3 states that the Union ‘shall respect the richness of its cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure the preservation and development of Europe’s cultural heritage.’ This is not merely a statement of principle. In the Marrakesh Treaty (1994), the Union fought hard to secure the ‘cultural exception’, which the US was determined to oppose at all costs. In doing so, it preserved national—and sometimes regional—cultures, including languages, which might otherwise have been overwhelmed by globalisation.

In Article 4 of the TEU, the treaty states that the Union has only those powers expressly conferred upon it. It should be noted that policies relating to income redistribution, those at the heart of national identity (education, culture, the arts), and internal and external security remain within the full competence of the member states. The Union has no right to levy taxes or to maintain an army. In practical terms, after 70 years of European integration, 99% of public revenue collected within the territory of the member states is redistributed at the national level.

Similarly, each state is free to define the conditions for nationality and citizenship within its own borders. France is as committed to the *jus soli* as Germany and the countries of Central Europe are to the *jus sanguinis*. Hungary has naturalised all the descendants of Hungarian families living in neighbouring countries. Malta has taken the liberty of selling passports and citizenship to very wealthy nationals of third

countries. These choices are not without impact on the number and distribution of European citizens.

Again according to Article 4 of the TEU, the Union does not interfere with ‘national identity’, nor with ‘fundamental political and constitutional structures, the essential functions of the State, starting with security, nor regional and local organisation’. This is all very well, but where, in cases of shared competences, should the boundary be drawn between the role of the Union and that of national capitals? The answer was sought in a concept derived from canon law: the principle of subsidiarity. This is set out in Article 5 of the Treaty: ‘By virtue of the principle of subsidiarity, in areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Union shall act only if, and insofar as, the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, whether at central, regional or local level, but can be better achieved, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, at Union level.’

Is this a preliminary step that is difficult to implement in practice? It is the national parliaments that are designated as the arbiters, in accordance with a protocol annexed to the Treaty. More generally, Article 12 of the Treaty sets out the role of national parliaments in the democratic life of the Union.

Another area where member states have made different choices concerns the ownership of enterprises and the privileges of services of general economic interest (what the French call ‘public services’). The Treaty merely requires that public enterprises ‘shall not enact or maintain in force any measure contrary to the rules of the Treaties’ in the field of competition (Article 106). Subject only to this proviso, the Union leaves member states entirely free to decide on the ownership — whether private or public — of enterprises, contrary to what advocates of nationalisation in countries spared by Communism have claimed. Indeed, one need only recall that the ECSC was established at the same time as the nationalisation of the coal and steel industries in several of the founding member states.

Another distinctive feature taken into account is the overseas countries and territories, to which the entire fourth part of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU

is devoted. These are the distant islands and other coastal territories which the tide of decolonisation left under the sovereignty of their former colonial powers. Each of these territories has inherited a special status from history. Not only does the Union not interfere in any way with these statuses or with the central state's relations with them, but a dedicated European programme supports them in their efforts to develop their economies whilst preserving their distinct identities. The territories may even go so far as to impose specific customs duties.

An interesting example is that of Greenland. Under a 2009 law, the territory was granted a status of special autonomy within the Kingdom of Denmark, which could lead to independence. However, it remains associated with the EU, whose policies apply to it, and it benefits from a special regime for fishery products, which account for 90% of its exports. In 2025, when President Trump made persistent efforts to bring Greenland under American influence, the active unanimity of the EU member states was the clearest demonstration of the benefits of belonging to the European family.

The rotating presidencies

Whilst merely a symbolic custom in many international organisations, the rotating presidency of ministerial meetings plays a very important educational role in the EU, particularly for new member states. For six months, a country's entire political and administrative elite is mobilised to 'steer' the Union. Each country thus takes up the torch of Europe in turn. Admittedly, the presidency of a Union meeting is more akin to an English-style 'chairmanship' than a Latin-style presidency: the chair of the meeting grants the floor to speakers; it is not his or her role to report on the texts or to decide on the political conclusion to be drawn from the debates. However, the presidency does have a say on the agenda for the six-month term, and it is the presidency that must lead negotiations with the Parliament's delegation. Each successive presidency is keen to demonstrate its European expertise by securing the adoption of as many texts as possible during its six-month term. This spirit of competition contributes significantly to the efficiency of the European legislative machinery.

As a result, collective—and even national—pride has become a powerful driving

force for the Union. This is a historical dimension that has not been sufficiently emphasised and which would merit closer examination on a country-by-country basis.

Proportional representation

The European Parliament has been elected by universal suffrage since 1979. With the notable exception of full budgetary powers, it has exercised genuine parliamentary powers since the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007. It remains, to this day, the only multinational parliament in the world. Comprising 720 MEPs from 27 countries, belonging to dozens of different national political parties and grouped into half a dozen political groups in Strasbourg, the Parliament is a melting pot that is constantly devising tools for the promotion of peace.

To begin with, in every country, MEPs are elected at the same time and under a system of proportional representation. The treaties provide for an identical system for all, but apart from the principle of proportionality, it has not been possible to agree on a single model. Never mind: as an inevitable consequence of proportional representation, no single political family can hope to hold a majority on its own in Strasbourg. Consequently, no parliamentary majority is possible without compromise between the groups representing the major political families around which national political life is organised. For parliamentary work to be effective, this kaleidoscope must be concentrated into a small number of groups. To this end, the formation of groups is subject to a requirement for multinational composition: they must comprise at least 25 members representing 7 nationalities.

The application of the d'Hondt method—named after a nineteenth-century Belgian mathematician—enables a newly elected Parliament to agree on the allocation of vice-presidencies, quaestorships and committee chairmanships shortly after the opening of proceedings, and subsequently on the allocation of reports. This mathematical rule ensures that all parliamentary groups are involved in the running of Parliament and its responsibilities, based solely on each group's number of MEPs. Within each group, nationalities are treated equally. This saves a great deal of time and avoids potential conflicts.

Ultimately, the d'Hondt method has the same effect in Parliament as the rotation of presidencies in the Council of Ministers: it ensures that everyone participates, either simultaneously or in turn, in the exercise of European responsibilities. It enables every decision-maker to 'take ownership' of Europe. This is what is described by the fine English term 'empowerment'.

The unexpected role of the multinational Parliament

The primary role of the European Parliament is, of course, to ensure the representation of the peoples and to confer full democratic legitimacy upon the Union. However, in a multinational context, it fulfils another role that is as important as it is overlooked. It tempers national passions in the decision-making process.

In the early days of the European Communities, mistrust prevailed between the member states. All decisions were taken unanimously by government representatives, that is, in the Council of Ministers. Difficult with 6 members, unanimity became virtually impossible with more than 12. Once the initial mistrust had been dispelled, it became possible to move to qualified majority voting. In practical terms, this means that France may be required to implement a piece of legislation to which it has objected. If the French minister loses a vote, it is a mere footnote. If he loses two in quick succession, it is a political setback. If he loses three, it is a national humiliation: a single person represents the entire nation. This is quite simply unacceptable, regardless of which member state is involved.

But now the final decision requires the approval of another assembly, the Parliament. It is much larger, has a different composition and operates along political party lines. As each country is represented there by MEPs with a wide range of political views, national votes are split between 'for', 'against' and abstentions: national allegiances are greatly diluted. Under these circumstances, the failure of a vote in the Council of Ministers certainly weakens the minority minister, and possibly his government, but it no longer calls national honour into question: it may even be a godsend for the

domestic opposition. Furthermore, anticipating the final vote in Parliament, the minority minister will himself water down his position, and his colleagues will not hesitate to make a few concessions to help him save face. Often, the Council endeavours to adopt the final compromise unanimously, even when unanimity is not required.

Conversely, the requirement to secure a qualified majority in the Council reassures the public that European laws are not dictated by an entirely ideological debate that ignores current national realities. This was rarely a concern when the only possible majority in Parliament was made up of the moderate left and right. However, the shift in the balance of power within the Parliament since 2024 has brought this concern to the fore.

And so Community decision-making is a positive-sum game, a win-win situation. If 'Brussels' has ultimately won over public opinion, it is because everyone can find elements of satisfaction in the final decision when one has been taken there: all member states have contributed to it, and the main political groups have been able to amend it. This is a genuine culture and a genuine *savoir-faire*.

The trilogue

In ordinary negotiations, it sometimes happens that a third party is needed, either as a mediator or an arbitrator. In national bicameral systems, in the event of persistent disagreement between the two chambers, the constitution generally gives the final say to the assembly elected by direct universal suffrage. Or, as in the US, there is no solution in the absence of an agreement. However, 'united in diversity', the EU cannot give the final say to either governments or parliamentarians, and deadlock is not an option. Thus, experience has led to the establishment of a *sui generis* legislative procedure: negotiations between the Council and Parliament on a legislative text take the unique form of a trilogue.

As the author of the original draft legislation, the Commission takes part in the conciliation meeting following the first vote in each of the institutions. Its role is not limited to acting as a mediator. It takes a stance on the Parliament's amendments, and

the Council can only reject those the Commission supports if the Council achieves unanimity in its rejection. This is a powerful tool for ensuring that the final text does not stray too far from the original intention.

The trilogue is the culmination of the preceding stages, which have already been facilitated by provisions conducive to finding compromise, as we have seen previously: proportional voting, application of the d'Hondt method, use of qualified majority voting, the technique of Community negotiation, and the mutual easing of tensions in internal debates within the Council and Parliament. The result is a remarkable efficiency in the production of EU legislation. In stark contrast to the political deadlocks that paralyse many national parliaments on both sides of the Atlantic, 89% of European laws are adopted after a single reading in the Parliament and the Council,¹ even though the Treaty allows for up to three readings for final conciliation. And the compromises reached do not merely concern secondary issues: on matters as sensitive as the climate transition, new digital services, and asylum and immigration, the Union has found pioneering solutions. Economists and legal experts have even spoken of the 'Brussels effect':² when it comes to unprecedented problems or new technologies, in a globalised market, the first major player to introduce regulations sets the tone for the others. The competitiveness of an economy also depends on the quality of its legislative and regulatory framework, just as much as on its tax framework.

The governance of the ECB

The success of the monetary union owes much to the system of governance devised for the functioning of the ECB.

Fundamentally, all the central banks of the Union, including those of countries that have remained outside the euro area, are brought together within the European System of Central Banks. The governors form a General Council, which is set to be dissolved once all EU member states have adopted the euro. Within the euro

1 European Parliamentary Research Service, 'Adoption of OLP Acts' (15 April 2025).

2 A. Bradford, 'The Brussels Effect', *Northwestern University Law Review* 107/1 (2012).

area itself, the Governing Council exercises the main decision-making power: it is responsible for defining the broad objectives, setting interest rates and choosing the technical arrangements for intervention.

Executive power is entrusted to an Executive Board. The president and a vice-president are joined by four other members. All are elected by the European Council for a term of eight years. In practice, the heads of state or government ensure that the major countries are systematically represented on the Board.

The most distinctive feature lies in the voting system within the Governing Council. The six members of the Executive Board have a permanent right to vote (but not a right of veto, as is the case in the UN Security Council). Among the governors themselves, the eurozone countries are divided into several groups according to the size of their economies and financial sectors, with voting rights exercised on a rotating basis within these groups.

Thus, the ECB's governance model ensures that all major member states participate in decision-making without any one having a right of veto, whilst involving smaller member states through a rotational system. And, in practice, it has become customary to discuss matters until a consensus is reached.

This model, with its highly sophisticated complexity—discreet yet effective—is a tour de force. This has been evident since the most recent international crises: there is no more sensitive issue than household purchasing power. As the front-line institution in the fight against inflation, the ECB has earned great respect across all sections of society. During Jean-Claude Trichet's presidency, public trust in the ECB was generally higher than trust in national governments—a pattern that remains visible today.³ Long a red rag to all Eurosceptics, monetary union is now the main anchor to which the vast majority of EU citizens are attached.

This is a model of decision-making that could be applied in other areas.

3 S. Bergbauer et al., 'Citizens' Attitudes Towards the ECB, the Euro and Economic and Monetary Union', *ECB Economic Bulletin* 4 (2020).

The freedom to leave

Article 50 of the Treaty deserves a special mention: it is the ‘right to divorce’. Like most treaties and virtually all international organisations, the European treaties were concluded without any time limit, *ad infinitum*. Yet, treaty after treaty, the family circle continued both to deepen and to widen. Some citizens experienced a sort of motion sickness. They contested not so much the *acquis* of the moment as the risk of future developments which seemed to them likely to be disastrous and inexorable. Neither a federation nor a confederation, the EU is a family of free peoples. As in any family, members must feel at ease within it, and even happy to benefit from family solidarity and proud to contribute to it. But if this is no longer the case for one of the members, that member must be able to withdraw from the family when it so decides and in accordance with its internal procedures. This is a crucial provision from a political, psychological and legal perspective: by retaining the option to extricate itself from European constraints, each member state fully retains its sovereignty.

Brexit has confirmed the validity of this innovation. Admittedly, the political shock was enormous. But as the provision is enshrined in the Union’s founding treaty, the Union, whilst weakened, has not been torn apart. And experience has quickly convinced the continent’s sovereigntists of the benefits of remaining in the club rather than slamming the door on it without proper prior reflection. The long journey undertaken since then by London, without a clear idea of its final destination, has given rise to regrets on the other side of the Channel. As the former MEP Jean-Louis Bourlanges put it, with a touch of humour directed at our British friends: ‘The British have always sought to have one foot in the Union and one foot outside it; from now on, it will be the other way round’.⁴ On the continent, the freedom to leave has strengthened the sense of family.

4 France, Senate, European Affairs Committee, ‘Hearing of Harlem Désir, Secretary of State for European Affairs, on the Conclusions of the European Council of 28 and 29 June 2016’ (5 July 2016), quoting Jean-Louis Bourlanges.

Enlargement: is the Union a victim of its own success?

In 1950 the first European Community was conceived based on Franco-German relations. Six countries took part, but the founders hoped to win over Britain as well. Article 247 of the Treaty of Rome was addressed primarily to Britain: 'Any European State may become a member of the Community.'

Initially, the UK preferred to establish a rival organisation of a purely intergovernmental nature, the European Free Trade Association. It soon became clear, however, that the customs union of the six offered the more successful model. In 1973 the UK chose to join the European Economic Community, together with Ireland and Denmark. The Community then became a beacon for neighbouring countries still living under despotic regimes. Freed respectively from military dictatorship, Salazarism and Francoism, Greece, Portugal and Spain joined in the 1980s. It was then the turn of the former 'people's democracies' of Eastern Europe to dream of a 'return to Europe', as they compared life in the West with the dismal record of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance.

It is remarkable to note that the expansion of the club was never part of its ambitions, neither in the treaties nor in the speeches. It was the opposite of an empire. But the Union's success attracted such a wide variety of applications that the question arose as to where its ultimate borders lay. We have now forgotten that, at various times, political figures as unexpected as King Hassan II of Morocco, Russian President Vladimir Putin and certain Israeli leaders openly raised the possibility of their countries joining the EU! What, then, did the adjective 'European'—the sole geographical criterion for membership set out in Article 237 of the Treaty of Rome—actually mean? Geographers, philosophers, historians, ethnologists, artists, theologians and politicians have vied with one another in erudition and passion to define Europe and to deduce its 'natural' borders. In doing so, they all implicitly accepted that the Union now embodied, or risked embodying, the concept in its entirety.

This overlooked the fact that, from day one, the answer had been set out very clearly in the founding text. It lies in the procedure for approving an enlargement treaty, now laid down in Article 49. The principle of admitting a candidate country must be adopted unanimously by the governments and by a simple majority of the European Parliament, and the terms of accession are subject to ratification by all member states. Combined with the ‘right to withdraw’ under Article 50, this procedure establishes, in international law, a sort of ‘family law of nations’. The Union is thus structured like a family of peoples, which a new member may join if all the existing members agree, but from which any member may leave at any time if they no longer feel at home.

Recognition of this reality eventually put an end to the controversy—which had been rather regrettably provoked by the European Council—over the case of Türkiye. In 1999 in Helsinki, during the polar night of a Finnish December, the European Council celebrated the turn of the century with champagne whilst unanimously endorsing Türkiye’s membership application, to the general astonishment of parliaments and the public, who had not been consulted. As public opinion was overwhelmingly opposed in several member states, this led to 20 years of misunderstandings and acrimony between Brussels and Ankara. This continued until everyone realised the political impossibility of Türkiye’s membership, Türkiye itself having since taken a distinct path, with Islamist authoritarianism succeeding a semi-military dictatorship.

Conversely, it is likely that Ukraine will benefit from the grateful sympathy of the peoples of Europe for the heroism it has shown in defending its independence and our shared values.

Other candidate countries have been in the waiting room for a long time, having failed to make the necessary progress. Some venture to suggest that they might become discouraged and throw in the towel. That would be unfortunate, but it would not be a failure on the part of the Union: it is not expansionist, and so far it has managed perfectly well without them. There is no doubt that Brexit was a severe setback for the European cause, but ultimately, 10 years on, it is regretted more in Britain than on the continent.

Enlargement: the Copenhagen criteria

How can the family spirit and unity be preserved when new members join? This question arose as early as the first enlargement: it concerned the UK, which made no secret of its different conception of a European community. Its significance has continued to grow with the number of new member states and their extraordinary heterogeneity. It was in 1993, in Copenhagen, that the Union—then the Europe of the 12—set out the accession criteria in black and white.

The candidate country must have clearly opted for a democratic system of government. The Treaty of Lisbon specified that the offer applied to ‘any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and undertakes to promote them’. Article 2 is a summary of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU.

Similarly, the candidate country must respect the rules of the market economy.

Accession must be preceded by adoption of the entire *acquis communautaire*, that is to say, the body of legislation accumulated by the Union since its inception. In return, the EU has been generous in helping the new institutions of (re)emerging democracies to prepare their applications.

Furthermore, it is accepted that the date of accession must be set taking into account the Union’s capacity to absorb new members and its own timetable.

Having learned their lesson from the negotiations with the British, negotiators in Brussels have always taken care to limit to the absolute minimum any permanent exceptions (opt-outs) from which a new member might benefit. Denmark proved a tough nut to crack, securing special arrangements regarding monetary union, defence policy, and police and judicial cooperation. Over time, these opt-out clauses have lost much of their relevance, and the war in Ukraine even convinced two-thirds of Danish citizens to support European defence in a resounding referendum in 2025. What remains is a very discreet protocol whereby the Danes reserve the right to restrict other European citizens’ access to the ownership of second homes—a reminder of

the risk the country faced from de facto annexation by wealthy German families in the nineteenth century. Upon its accession in 2004, Poland made a point of withdrawing from the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, mirroring the UK's move, but it is no longer entirely clear what the practical significance of this Polish protocol is today.

Rather than opt-outs, the EU prefers to give new members time to adapt following their accession. The best example was the grace period granted to Spain and Portugal regarding the implementation of the common fisheries policy. Ultimately, both countries were able to comply well before the 12-year transition period originally envisaged. In 1994 the Austrians would have liked to retain control over the regulation of road freight traffic in the Alpine valleys, but a seven-year transition period resolved the issue. The Swedes did not wish to ban the traditional consumption of chewing tobacco within their own borders, but they had to agree to prohibit all exports of this carcinogenic product to their partner countries. Respect for the greatest possible diversity must not compromise the harmony of the Union, nor the health of its citizens.

It is a strange union, to be sure. It is easier to leave it than to join it. The statutes begin by dwelling at length on what it is not allowed to do, whilst specifying that, in any case, anything not expressly permitted is prohibited. When it is allowed to intervene, it must do so as little as possible. Furthermore, it lacks the means to fund its responsibilities, let alone its ambitions: this must make it feel ever more constrained. And yet, it works!

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About the author

Alain Lamassoure is a former French Minister for European Affairs and Minister for the Budget, and a former Member of the European Parliament, where he served from 1989 to 1993 and from 1999 to 2019. He chaired the European Parliament's Committee on Budgets and participated in the Convention on the Future of Europe in 2002–3. He is currently Chair of the Scientific Council of the Robert Schuman Foundation and Chair of the Governing Board of the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe.



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Welfare States, Party Systems and the Miracle of Social Peace in Europe

Angelos Chryssogelos

The European peace is under threat. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the disruption brought about by Donald Trump, chronic instability in the Middle East and the rising challenge of China make it obvious that Europe's long era of relative geopolitical stability is coming to an end. Consequently, the debate has shifted to how to rearm the EU and make it a military power. Looking at the geopolitical context, and dynamics such as Russia's growing infringement of the European strategic space, it is difficult to argue that this should be the EU's priority in the coming years.

While all this is true, it also downplays an important parameter behind Europe's 80-year-old peace that is currently under threat: this peace was not only a creation of strategy and geopolitics, but also relied on deep and steady foundations in domestic politics. In effect, it was the specific structure of party-political competition and its link with national societies that not only produced the broad societal consensus for the foreign policy choices that made geopolitical peace possible, but that also reproduced this peace domestically as a broad-based and widely-supported *social peace*.

The argument of this chapter is that we cannot appreciate European peace in its entirety without accounting for its domestic dimensions: the establishment of robust and cooperative market economies with large degrees of ideological consensus and socio-economic solidarity. Indeed, if Europe's post-war geopolitical peace can be seen as a 'miracle' relative to what had happened earlier, as argued in this volume, this cannot be understood without taking into account the causes and the role of social peace, itself no less a miracle on a continent that until the mid-twentieth century had produced the world's gravest totalitarian ideologies.

Once we understand this connection, we must then ask ourselves to what degree current debates about rearming Europe sideline this domestic dimension, which endangers the long-term social consensus on the sacrifices necessary to safeguard European peace, as well as the important accomplishments of the European social model itself. Are the demands of geopolitical peace coming up against the limits of social peace? And is this a dilemma that the EU can reconcile or a stark choice between two incompatible demands? This chapter will offer some reflection on this in the conclusion.

European peace: a story of domestic politics

The pacification of the European continent after 1945 is typically seen as the outcome of a specific geopolitical constellation. Following the destruction of the Second World War, the European continent was divided by two rival superpowers; while one was arguably more benevolent than the other, the fact remains that with the onset of the Cold War, Europeans were no longer holding their strategic fate in their own hands. The positive implication of this was that, after centuries of incessant war, Europe enjoyed unprecedented stability and peace. Superpower dominance on either side of the Cold War divide ensured more or less friendly relations between members of the same camp, while the nuclear standoff between the US and the USSR did the same for relations between the two camps. After the end of the Cold War, and despite widespread fears of general instability on the continent, the swift enlargement of Euro-Atlantic institutions to the east established a robust geopolitical framework that ensured the continuation of peace, with the notable exception of the ethnic wars that followed the dissolution of Yugoslavia.¹

While this narrative of the miracle of European peace is accurate, it downplays the fact that this geopolitical edifice required the creation, and then stabilisation and expansion, of a permissive structure in domestic politics across Europe. If this was indeed a miracle, we must account for a broader constellation of factors, each playing its own necessary role. This domestic perspective is a way to highlight the agency of Europeans themselves, since the conducive geopolitical framework would not have led to peace without the commitment of European elites and citizens to it. Without this domestic dimension, I argue, peace would not be self-evident. The exceptions to this picture of generalised peace, such as the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and the Prague Spring of 1968, followed by Soviet invasions, show how stability does not follow automatically from any geopolitical situation if it is not underpinned by domestic, social peace.

1 For more general information, see M. Kaeding, J. Pollak and P. Schmidt (eds.), *Enlargement and the Future of Europe: Views From the Capitals* (Cham: Springer, 2023).

The importance of domestic politics for European peace should not be a surprise to anyone familiar with twentieth-century history. Although it played out as a conflict among rival states and their hegemonic aspirations, the Second World War had its roots in the major ideological conflicts of the nineteenth century that had been created by industrialisation and the pressing questions it posed about the political and socio-economic management of the new mass society. Before they aligned along national lines, the three main models—free-market liberal democracy, fascism and Nazism, and Communism—were internally ravaging European states, most of which went through periods of extensive instability, turmoil and polarisation in the lead up to the Second World War.² If that had continued after the war as well, the bipolar geopolitical division of Europe would have been not a factor of stability and further peace but of instability and, perhaps ultimately, another war.

Clearly, something had to work in a specific way *within* the European states—at least in Western Europe, where democratic politics was still possible—for peace to take root. What was crucial was a fortunate combination of circumstances: responsible and visionary elites, robust mass parties, vibrant civil societies, and a consensus that geopolitical peace required domestic societal and socio-economic peace as its foundation. Once this combination was achieved, not only did the Cold War situation become a framework for peace, but when it collapsed it became possible for the EU to peacefully incorporate post-Communist states and extend the zone of democratic and liberal peace all the way to the Russian border.

Domestic politics as a cause of peace

The Second World War had delegitimised Fascist parties in Western Europe but had left Communist parties as legitimate competitors in the electoral arena and, in some countries—especially in the European south—as competitive contestants for political power. This meant that those parties that were committed to liberal democracy and the free market had the responsibility of both rebuilding European

2 E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939* (Cham: Springer, 2016).

economies and doing so in a way that would keep the kind of class and ideological polarisation that had led to the Second World War from emerging again. In their task, they could count on robust mass organisations and a dense network of associations that reached deep into society, both of which had survived the ravages of the war.

The broad-based mass nature of party politics in post-war Europe must not be underestimated as a factor that contributed to democratic and ultimately geopolitical stability. As leaders of large mass organisations that had connections to multiple societal institutions comprising millions of members—churches, trade unions and sectional organisations—the political elites in post-war Europe became adept at practising the politics of practical solutions and compromise, rather than of identity. All these interests had to be aggregated and reconciled, both within parties and between them. Brokering agreements of practical socio-economic interest, rather than fighting over the highly emotional issues of identity that had destabilised Europe in the past, became the main mission of national party politics and the benchmark against which politicians' performance was judged.³

These political forces decided to base domestic social peace on a grand bargain that was underpinned by the social market economy and the welfare state.⁴ Although the welfare state had existed before the war, after 1945 it expanded rapidly in almost all Western European countries (again, southern Europe was a partial exception to this) to meet the broad demand for a more equitable economic organisation. It is important to remember however, that the European welfare state was also a democratic/representational proposition. Contrary to libertarian Anglo-Saxon critiques that present it as an impersonal bureaucratic beast,⁵ in post-war Europe the welfare

3 A. Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022); P. Mair (ed.), *The West European Party System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

4 This also included centre-right Christian Democratic parties. On the distinct Christian Democratic welfare state model of 'social capitalism', see K. van Kersbergen, *Social Capitalism: A Study of Christian Democracy and of the Welfare State* (London: Routledge, 1995).

5 See for instance P. E. Gottfried, *After Liberalism: Mass Democracy in the Managerial State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

state directly represented major societal interests through large mass parties and the trade unions, employers' associations and farmers' groups linked to them.⁶

This arrangement had two important and interlinked repercussions with regard to European peace. First, it contributed to the distinctly European achievement of social peace, exhibited through widespread prosperity, widely supported liberal democratic systems and welfare provisions that did not thwart economic growth. This outcome should not be underestimated. As the example of the US shows today, economic growth must be channelled through specific political institutions, socio-economic arrangements and broadly shared common values to produce societal peace. If it does not, societies can become highly fragmented and polarised. The pre-war experience had taught Europeans that social cohesion is a precondition for peace. Even if it can sometimes sound self-serving, the notion of the 'European social model' does capture the uniqueness of Europe's socio-economic arrangements, if not in terms of a uniform welfare 'model' across Europe then at least in terms of generally shared aspirations and policy outputs, in comparison to those of other major industrialised regions in North America and Asia.⁷

Second, centripetal political competition based on mass parties capable of brokering different socio-economic class interests fed directly into Europe's geopolitical peace. The mass parties, which were strongly embedded in their societies and enjoyed a high degree of legitimacy due to their good performance, were capable of 'delivering' popular approval (in the shape of tolerance if not enthusiastic support) for the major geopolitical decisions of their governments: the creation of NATO, the founding of the European Economic Community/EU, and the subsequent leaps of integration, such as the creation of the common currency and EU enlargement.

6 A. Jäger and D. Zamora, "'Welfare Without the Welfare State': The Death of the Postwar Welfarist Consensus", *New Statesman*, 9 February 2021.

7 D. Vaughan-Whitehead, 'The European Social Model in Times of Crisis: An Overview', in D. Vaughan-Whitehead (ed.), *The European Social Model in Crisis* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2015). For a critical view of the concept, see M. Jepsen and A. S. Pascual, 'The European Social Model: An Exercise in Deconstruction', *Journal of European Social Policy* 15/3 (2005).

The achievement of EU enlargement, in particular, was a major turning point in the story of European peace, and it would not have been successful without the strong legitimacy given to it by political forces on both sides of the post-Communist divide. In the West, enlargement was not self-evidently popular or a priori accepted; indeed, it was, and in some ways still remains, quite controversial among large parts of society in most Western European states. But the elites in these states were able to convince their electorates that enlargement was essential to complete the project of European peace and security—the contrast with today’s ‘enlargement fatigue’ and the fearfulness of EU governments to push the same argument is telling. Similarly, in post-Communist countries EU accession was generally supported for geopolitical and historical reasons, but this support was further strengthened by the appeal of the (Western) European model and the ways it both extended prosperity and alleviated the hardships of transition. In Central and Eastern Europe the legitimacy of the elites making this argument was also undeniably important, drawn as they were from the two major camps of anti-Communist liberal dissidence on the one hand and reformed post-Communist parties with significant links to organised interests on the other.⁸ In this sense, social peace was itself a major *cause* of geopolitical peace.

It is of course the case that since the end of the Cold War, this idyllic picture of mass party politics, welfare state compromise, and the social consensus and legitimacy of liberal democracy and European integration has been undermined.⁹ There are many reasons for this. The practice of party politics has been transformed and parties have lost their mass character, partly due to their own strategic choices and partly due to social changes that have undermined the links to their constituencies. Heightened economic competition within the framework of globalisation has forced European states and the EU collectively to promote structural reforms that have scaled back

8 T. Plümpert, C. J. Schneider and V. E. Troeger, ‘The Politics of EU Eastern Enlargement: Evidence From a Heckman Selection Model’, *British Journal of Political Science* 36/1 (2006).

9 This was arguably already happening before the crises of the 2010s, which intensified this ongoing process. See L. Hoogh and G. Marks, ‘A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus’, *British Journal of Political Science* 39/1 (2009).

some of the promises of the post-war welfare state compromise.¹⁰ Lagging economic performance and a succession of crises in the last 15 years have also undermined the legitimacy of political elites and given rise to the ascendancy of assertive populist parties, most of which explicitly undermine the European social peace, which is clearly reaching its limits.

Having said this, the story of the 15 years since the economic recession is not only one of crisis but also of the resilience of European integration, liberal democracy and the social model. Through the eurozone and migration crises, the Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine, social cohesion, the legitimacy of liberal democracy and the integrity of the EU (with the exception of Brexit) have been more or less safeguarded. A comparison with the political degradation and social and ideological polarisation of the US in this same period is telling. While both sides of the Atlantic have undergone similar challenges and crises—and arguably the EU has faced bigger ones, taking into account its institutional fragmentation and geopolitical exposure—many indicators of social cohesion have remained in Europe’s favour.¹¹ It is the high resilience of Europe’s societies, economies and politics that has ultimately proved wrong the predictions in the 2010s of the demise of the eurozone and even of the entire EU.

The limits of Europe’s domestic peace in an era of geopolitical uncertainty

The above analysis is not only of historical value. At a moment when the EU is faced with the war in Ukraine, Trump’s assault on the international order and heightened economic competition with China, the question becomes how to respond in a way that will maintain the support of the peoples of Europe. While European elites have, so far, chosen a securitised discourse, presenting peace primarily in geopolitical and militaristic terms, the domestic dimensions of European peace, linked

10 P. Mair, *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy* (London: Verso, 2013).

11 See, e.g. this analysis, conducted at the height of the eurozone crisis: T. Gylfason, ‘Economic Performance in Two Dimensions: How Europe Beats the US’, *VoxEU*, 22 August 2016.

to social cohesion, economic prosperity and democratic legitimacy, should not be underestimated. Arguably, seriously addressing these dimensions is a precondition for sustaining popular support for the EU's efforts to turn itself into a real strategic player.

A sole focus on geopolitical security, ignoring the lessons of the first 70 years of European integration, carries two risks for the EU. First, it could undermine social cohesion and what is left of the continent's centripetal party systems and ideological consensus on liberal democracy and European integration. It may be true that in opinion polls Europeans appear overwhelmingly supportive of the EU's strategic and military turn,¹² but one must not underestimate that most citizens remain wedded to the core principles of the model that produced the social peace of the previous decades. While proceeding with the rearmament and reforms needed to safeguard Europe's industrial capacity and competitiveness, European leaders must not lose sight of the fact that these measures will be self-defeating if they increase socio-economic hardships and further erode citizens' trust in their political systems and, ultimately, the EU. This would only accelerate the continent's takeover by populists, with disastrous consequences for its geopolitical standing as well.

The second risk is that this project proceeds in a way that is insulated from democratic legitimacy and public deliberation, misunderstanding the 'permissive consensus' of previous decades as being sufficient for the project that the EU is undertaking today. It is true that from the 1950s to the 1990s European voters did not express active enthusiasm for pursuing integration and enlargement, providing only indifferent permission to their leaders. But, as we have seen, this permissive consensus took place in a context of legitimate representative systems, mass parties and welfare states that had already crumbled well before the major crises of the 2010s. Today's situation is very different in this respect, and the challenges that Europe is facing are too big for EU leaders to presume that any passive permission from citizens (if it exists at all) will be sustainable in the long run for decisions that

12 K. E. Schilde, S. B. Anderson and A. D. Garner. 'A More Martial Europe? Public Opinion, Permissive Consensus, and EU Defence Policy', *European Security* 28/2 (2019).

are bound to demand sacrifices.

The need for democratic legitimacy for this next step of European integration and securing continental peace must be acknowledged, especially by the current EU leadership. Since 2019 the EU has embarked on a number of far-reaching and ambitious reform projects, often in response to major crises, from the Green Deal and the negotiations on vaccine procurement and the establishment of the European Recovery Fund with the issuance of common debt, to the coordination of European rearmament. Most of these projects have been worthwhile responses to crises that were beyond the EU's control.

Yet, while they addressed obvious needs, it is also true that these projects were undertaken in a top-down way, presuming European citizens' preferences rather than having them voiced and represented. This inevitably led to reversals when the economic costs became apparent to voters and the political ones to politicians, as evidenced in the scaling back of the ambitions of the green transition after the 2024 European Parliament election.¹³ A similar fate may very well await any ambitious rearmament project agreed enthusiastically at the elite level but not explained properly, and subjected to the inputs and approval of European societies.

In many ways, the EU political system in recent years has resembled not a properly functioning liberal democracy, as it likes to think of itself, but Europe's elitist liberal-bureaucratic regimes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In these regimes, an executive appointed by a monarch (in today's EU the equivalent role would be played by the leaders of the member states) tried to rule by playing majorities off against each other in partially democratised parliaments. Decisions were thus made largely in the absence of any real societal debate or mass involvement. The purpose of these systems was not to represent societal preferences, but to balance elite interests and insulate the ultimate political authority from any accountability for difficult decisions.

13 See, e.g. A. Niranjani, 'EU Rollback on Environmental Policy Is Gaining Momentum, Warn Campaigners', *The Guardian*, 26 June 2025.

In the liberal–bureaucratic regimes of past centuries, the king could assign blame for any wrongs to his prime minister and dismiss him. In today’s Union, national leaders routinely blame the EU—whose leadership they have appointed—for any failures of policy and coordination. In this setup, a convergent strategy between the two sides emerges. On the one hand, using the succession of crises as an excuse, the EU executive happily expands its prerogatives (now into security and defence), presenting them as a necessary ‘collective response’ to these crises. National political elites, on the other hand, are happy to be shielded from further scrutiny for decisions that are seemingly made and executed on the EU level, even though they require their approval. As a result, the EU becomes ever-more ambitious at the same time as its democratic gap with European citizens continues to grow.¹⁴

As a result, the EU is today moving towards the next crucial phase of its integration—the build-up of its strategic and security capacity—without any of the domestic political conditions that made previous rounds of integration and expansion palatable to European citizens. As with decisions on the green transition and the recovery fund, the sole legitimating basis for these moves is the top-down presumption of European citizens’ wishes on the basis of opinion polls and deductions about the need for ‘security’. It is true that the build-up of European defence and even the creation of something akin to an ‘EU army’ generally score highly in surveys of public opinion. But this is quite different from engaging European societies through robust representational links that will make citizens feel that these decisions include their input. If this does not happen, the project of European security and defence could fall victim to the same trap of elite promises and subsequent public disenchantment as has happened with other policies in recent years.¹⁵

14 C. J. Bickerton, D. Hodson and U. Puetter (eds.), *The New Intergovernmentalism: States and Supranational Actors in the Post-Maastricht Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

15 This process may have already started even before the full costs of rearmament have become evident. See K. Neubert, ‘Public Support for EU Defence Spending Past Its Peak, Says Poll’, *Euractiv*, 7 October 2025.

Conclusion

The successful history of European integration since the end of the Second World War —the miracle of European peace—shows that domestic peace and external/geopolitical peace go hand in hand. Major decisions in favour of deepening European integration and EU enlargement were only possible because of the high degree of trust in domestic elites and the strong links between societies and mass parties. The welfare state compromise and moderate socio-economic policies gave Europe a high degree of social cohesion and economic development. The European social model underpinned citizens' support (however passive) for policies that strengthened peace and security in Europe. This positive equilibrium of geopolitical and social peace, the one the cause of the other, remained in place even after the end of the Cold War and the general weakening of European party systems, as voters continued to see the link between domestic and geopolitical peace.

Today, these lessons from the past must not be forgotten. European citizens appear ready to accept the costs of the continent's rearmament in the face of new major geopolitical risks. Yet they will only do so if these policies explicitly safeguard not only their strategic security but also the social accomplishments of previous years. In this respect, European leaders should be careful not to over-promise ambitious new policies that face the dual danger of both failing on their own merits and generating a backlash against their costs. These new policies will require important buy-in from citizens, which cannot happen merely on the basis of a presumed permissive consensus. With the help of the mainstream parties of the centre-right and centre-left, which still maintain the initiative in national party systems, and by relying on a large and resilient middle class that can still support moderate and necessary policies, the EU must actively seek to build long-term mass support for decisions that will be difficult but ultimately vital for Europe's domestic as well as external peace.

If the EU's geopolitical turn is indeed necessary, the lessons of how social peace underpinned the miracle of geopolitical peace in the previous 80 years must also guide this new phase in the evolution of European integration. As discussed above,

the welfare state compromise was never about money alone. It was, above all, an exercise in mass democratic representation, political intra-elite moderation and compromise, and the institutionalisation of social participation and active stake-taking in the functioning of the economy. By the same token, mainstream political parties should today seek to broaden public debate on the structure and purposes of European defence, offering distinct ideological perspectives on some of its dimensions while cultivating public support for its core mission of protecting the continent's security. They should also be open about the sacrifices and restructurings this change will require, while explaining why key dimensions of Europe's social peace—liberal democracy, the openness of our societies and social cohesion in the face of major external threats—require geopolitical readiness. Finally, much like national defence policy and many other EU policy areas, European defence policy must also include channels for democratic control and representation.

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About the author

Angelos Chrysogelos is Associate Professor in Politics and International Relations at the School of Social Sciences of London Metropolitan University and a Research Associate at the Martens Centre. In the past he has held positions at the London School of Economics, King's College London, Harvard University and the Schuman Centre of the European University Institute.



Memory, Education and Reconciliation in the European Discourse on History Teaching

Piero S. Colla

Memory politics: cement for an EU identity?

The emergence of a politically reunified Europe—from the transfer of sovereignty enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty of 1993 to the enlargements of 2004–7—created a testing ground for a shared memorial paradigm. This crucial development prompted an attempt to come to terms with the wounds and traumas handed down from generation to generation, as reflected in the conflicting narratives used by EU citizens to frame the fates of their nations and their relations to the rest of the world. ‘Inventing’ a new destiny required actively reworking an imaginary past and endowing it with new meanings.

Is it possible to evaluate the outcome of this effort? Perhaps. In any event it is necessary to do so, considering the growing conflicts that this issue—the social relevance of memory policies—is generating among historians, educators and policymakers at a time when the stagnation of the utopian vision of a united Europe risks the resurgence of its old demons. The following question may sum up these debates: has the ‘work of memory’ that the whole of Europe (with Germany as the front-runner) has undertaken over the last quarter of a century proved to be an effective, lasting remedy for the ills it sought to heal?

The aim of the Europe-wide (re)construction of a shared memory has never been explicitly stated, or fully agreed upon. On a political and institutional level, it appears to be a multi-voiced, asynchronous process, operating both from the top down and bottom up. Its distant roots stem from the efforts of the Council of Europe (CoE), where debates on how to heal the symbolic wounds of centuries of intra-European conflicts—by challenging national self-glorifying narratives—began in the aftermath of the Second World War. More recently, EU institutions—primarily the European Parliament and Council—have engaged in the process, which has made it possible to translate remembrance cultures into binding acts and official rituals, focusing on the anonymous victims of crimes against humanity, and elevating them to objects of collective identification. Suffice it to mention the 2008 Framework Decision on

combating racism and xenophobia (targeting genocide deniers),¹ and the institution of pan-European remembrance days: on 27 January, the date of the liberation of Auschwitz, and, since 2008, on 23 August, in the name of equal recognition for the victims of Nazism and Stalinism.²

Since 2004, politicisation of the issue has been driven by the stark divide between the way Europeans to the west and east of the former Iron Curtain understand and make sense of twentieth-century history. The work of memorial reshaping, which the European Parliament periodically calls for, has a clearly defined objective: the foundation of a shared European ‘historical consciousness’.³ However, it would be grossly simplistic to equate this with a programme of cultural engineering, intended to instil in the minds of citizens the legitimacy of a bold political utopia. This drive to forge a shared memory has not unfolded in a vacuum but should be understood within the context of a long-standing historical process: the emergence of a cosmopolitan, post-national consciousness, backed by the voluntary convergence of public institutions around a transnational ethos of memory and the mass cultural practices that validate it. Cross-national memory policies originated and developed outside of the EU federal project, even though they have often found an ideal ally inside it.

One coincidence is worth noting here: the concept of ‘memory’ began to find its way into both public and scientific discourse between the 1980s and 1990s, at a historical juncture when its political and strategic ‘usefulness’ was becoming apparent. The EU age of institutional inventiveness—marked by the historic revisions of the treaties in the 1980s and 1990s, the introduction of the single currency and the great enlargement of 2004—thus coincides, on a cultural level, with the emergence of a new relationship with the past; one based on emotion, the free appropriation of historical

1 European Council, Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law, OJ L328 (6 December 2008), 55.

2 See European Parliament, Resolution on a day to commemorate the Holocaust, OJ C166 (3 July 1995), 132; European Parliament, Resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism, OJ C137E (27 May 2010), 25.

3 European Parliament, Resolution on European historical consciousness, OJ C/2024/5721 (17 October 2024).

content and the glorification of history's anonymous agents. The publication in France in 1992 of the last volume of Pierre Nora's *The Realms of Memory* represents both a symptom and a scholarly reading of this shift.⁴

A variety of factors explain the strong appeal that the idea of governing the experience of the past exerts on the ruling class of the time. In the aftermath of the fall of the authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe, the striking divergence in the ethical representation of history after 1945 between the populations of the two Europes was identified as an obstacle to dialogue and the legitimacy of supranational institutions. As research has shown, the reactivation of the issue of 'ethnic cleansing' and racial violence during the wars in the former Yugoslavia between 1992 and 1995, and the need to come to terms with the racial and ideological violence of the twentieth century (long concealed in the official discourse of Communist countries) have made the realm of memory a model of multi-referential (or multidirectional) narratives, in which the denunciation of the past is presented as an antidote to its repetition in the future.⁵ A further incentive for the political use of the past was represented by the growing signs of crisis affecting the civic contract in the Western world: the rise, starting in France, of populist parties using historical counterfeiting as a weapon to rehabilitate an ethnic definition of national community. The European Parliament's first statement ('written declaration') on remembrance and denialism of the Second World War, in 1987,⁶ was dictated by a need to counter this trend by accurately recalling the history of racist violence in the twentieth century.

This sort of therapeutic ambition is not without its contradictions, and today sounds, at the very least, extremely naive. In a climate of isolationism and renewed interethnic conflicts, it is all too easy to denounce the limitations of memory policies or their inseparability from the explosion of endless 'memory wars'. However, this

4 P. Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*, vols. 1–3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–92).

5 D. Levy and N. Sznajder, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

6 European Parliament, Written declaration on the Holocaust, the European Parliament and Le Pen, OJ C318 (30 November 1987), 98.

does not alter the fact that, between the early 1990s and 2020, a pan-European koine was created in terms of vocabulary and cultural practices, with contributions from a wide variety of agents across the fields of politics, media and the arts. The rest of this article will focus on the cohesive impact of transnational memory policies from a specific perspective, namely their increasing influence on public education. One aspect that has been relatively neglected in research on the emergence of a common culture of memory is how the revision of history teaching standards in public school systems was the testing ground for this process, and the area where it has proved most effective.

School history: a laboratory for post-national identity politics

Although the theme of reconciling consciences is common to the transnational cooperation efforts undertaken after 1945 by the Allies, the CoE was the only institutional actor to identify history teaching as a strategic tool for nurturing a European spirit. The underlying ambition was to simultaneously work on both an imagined future and perceptions of the past. Curricula and teaching traditions were perceived as the most likely authoritative source of self-victimising or revanchist narratives, and therefore a possible driver of potential future conflicts between peoples and states. The CoE's activism in this area is indicative of a particular sensitivity to both the pitfalls and the potential of historical narrative in relation to the challenges of continental cooperation.

Among the cornerstones of the growing efforts in this area are references to the study of history in the cultural convention adopted on 19 December 1954,⁷ and earlier initiatives to 'detoxify' (in the words of Robert Schumann) school textbooks of the xenophobic prejudices which they contained.⁸ In the post-Second World War

7 Council of Europe, European Cultural Convention (Paris, 19 December 1954), ETS no. 018.

8 R. Schumann, 'The Political Implications of the Historical and Cultural Unity of Europeans', comments made at the European Round Table, Rome, 13–16 October 1953, Council of Europe. The objective of revising history and geography textbooks appears in a CoE recommendation as early as 1949; the pledge was reiterated in Council of Europe, Resolution on history and geography textbooks, Resolution (52)17 (19 March 1952).

context, the idea of integrating the experiences of neighbours or former enemies into national master narratives ('national novels' according to the well-established concept introduced by Nora) appeared much less self-evident than it does today: its development in the consciousness of educators appears to have been gradual—from limited pilot initiatives led by experts on the matter to the introduction of formal political acts. The CoE's commitment to the mutual scrutiny of teaching tools, established with the first conference in 1953 in Calw, Germany,⁹ followed on from pre-war initiatives undertaken at a bilateral level. Up to 1983, the CoE sponsored 12 international conferences on school textbooks and the teaching of history. These events were mainly aimed at teachers and school inspectors, who were brought together with academics in seminars that centred on cross-national assessment of the Europe-related content conveyed in textbooks. Nine hundred of the 2,000 textbooks then in use were studied during the first 6 conferences, with each conference concluding with a series of recommendations for school staff, textbook authors and curriculum developers.¹⁰

In hindsight, the objectives of these initiatives may appear too timid and off target. Faithful to a late-nineteenth-century model, the textbook was seen as the rigorous translation of a top-down nationalisation programme and a direct matrix, for better or worse, of the interpretation of history that students were to assimilate. The predominant didactic stance—the model of vertical transmission—was barely affected by criticisms of the presence of 'prejudices': the latter appeared as a sort of deviation from the 'objective', incontrovertible point of view. Furthermore, the criticism of nationalist distortions was driven by an ambition to replace the patriotic canon with a *European* myth that was no less irenic or binding. Ultimately, the task of implementing the recommendations defined by the experts and eliminating gross errors and prejudices from teaching materials was left to the competent authorities of

9 Recommendation adopted at the conference 'The European Idea in History Teaching' (Calw, 4–12 August 1953), in Council of Europe, *Against Bias and Prejudice. The Council of Europe's Work on History Teaching and History Textbooks, 1953–1995* (Strasbourg: Council for Cultural Co-operation, 1995), 13–14.

10 See Council of Europe, *Against Bias and Prejudice*.

each state, while the scope for autonomous agency among key grass-roots players (teachers, schools, local communities) remained limited. The values underlying these initiatives placed a strong emphasis on unifying factors and cultural icons—Athens, Erasmus, Lorenzo the Magnificent, the scientific revolution—in keeping with the genealogical model of national historical canons.

Although confined to the teaching community and with limited impact on school curricula, the debate on a pan-European approach to history teaching has gradually succeeded in bringing about a transnational teaching competence that aims to compare teaching methods and is capable of opening up channels of communication between compartmentalised teaching traditions. The work of evaluating and comparing textbooks became systematic when, in 1966, the *Schulbuchinstitut* in Braunschweig, directed by Georg Eckert, was commissioned by the CoE's Council for Cultural Cooperation to act as a centre for international research on textbooks. Since responsibility for drafting curricula lies entirely at the national level, the recommendations emerging from conferences and publications—for the study of contemporary history, for the adoption of a transnational perspective and for the inclusion of global socio-economic factors—could only serve as incentives. However, they also catalysed the creation of an ideology regarding the role of history in today's society: this was indicative of the growing consensus on teaching aims and methods, which paralleled the progress of European integration.

This agenda would regain its relevance as soon as the fall of the Berlin Wall brought together those visions of recent history which had remained isolated from one another. The CoE's response to this challenge was facilitated by the experience it had gained over the previous three decades: in December 1991, a conference in Bruges gathered teachers and education officials from across Europe for the first time. The inspiration stemmed from a democratic imperative: international organisations were being called upon to provide advice and expertise to those education systems seeking both to free themselves from the shackles of state ideology and to avoid the temptation of reviving

a nationalist canon.¹¹ The discussion would give a decisive boost to the exchange of experiences and activism in history teaching reform, particularly but not only in Eastern Europe and the Balkans: this dynamic resulted in the discussion moving from small circles of experts to the wider political arena. In 1996 the Council of Europe held a rare debate on the teaching of history. Two of the conclusions stand out: the universal recognition of the strategic relevance of history as a subject, and the need to acknowledge the existence of conflicting narratives within national canons. 'The history of our countries is essentially diverse, pluricultural and pluriethnic,' stated the Puig report, on which the recommendation finally adopted by the CoE's Parliamentary Assembly was based.¹²

After the signing in 1992 of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages,¹³ the CoE catalysed interest in the inclusion of minority or discriminated narratives in the teaching of history.¹⁴ The call to deepen the knowledge, beyond borders, of invisible and itinerant minorities (such as the Roma) or those who had been forgotten and forced into exile (such as Yiddish culture) was at the heart of its publications and recommendations. The goal of making plurality in history a doctrine was thus gradually acquiring an operational, experimental dimension. How could controversial histories be taught in contexts where past conflicts were daily evoked to stir up ethnic hatred? One path forward involved integrating early experiments in the multilateral rewriting of national history into broader forms of political cooperation on conflict management, bringing together educational expertise and hotbeds of interethnic conflict, which had multiplied since the collapse of the Soviet empire. Among the most significant examples were the Working Group on History and History Teaching in South-Eastern

11 Council for Cultural Cooperation, *L'enseignement de l'histoire dans la nouvelle Europe* (Strasbourg, 1993).

12 See L. M. de Puig I Olive, *History and the Learning of History in Europe*, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Committee on Culture, Science and Education, Doc. 7446 (22 December 1995), Exploratory memorandum, para. 84 and Recommendation 1283 (1996).

13 Council of Europe, European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Strasbourg, 5 November 1992), ETS no. 148.

14 Art. 8(g) of the Charter invited states to take steps to ensure the teaching of histories and cultures of which the regional or minority language is an expression.

Europe, which the CoE was invited to coordinate within the framework of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, and an intergovernmental programme, the Tbilisi Initiative, which was launched in September 1997 during a regional seminar. The scope of this latter project, supported by the educational authorities of Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation, went far beyond the creation of networks and informal exchanges between experts. It involved the modernisation of teaching content, curricula and teacher training through tools for teachers and school administrators, following a model that would be replicated in the former Yugoslavia and Chechnya.

These experiences were the driving force behind an epistemological focus, which was accompanied by a shift in attention from content to teaching methods. Historian Robert Stradling's analysis of multiperspectivity in teaching has become a point of reference for the CoE's reflections and has gradually been incorporated into national school curricula.¹⁵ The reiteration of the same themes (the opening up of national narratives to ethnic diversity, the critical negotiation of ethnocentric narratives) in the recommendations of the CoE's Committee of Ministers is a sign of a growing consensus on these principles, which underpin the harmonisation of educational apparatus within accession countries on the cusp of EU enlargement.¹⁶ The opening up of history curricula to cultural pluralism and subnational identities—in countries such as Romania, Poland and Serbia—is symptomatic of this.

Patrick Garcia has highlighted the implicit contradictions that weighed on the interest shown by European decision-makers in the history taught in schools during the feverish 1990s, which neutralised its concrete impact. On the one hand, in a reunified Europe, the enthusiastic rediscovery of the value of knowledge of the past for identity-building clashed with the observation of structural divergences among the narratives in circulation. On the other hand, the drive towards an objective narrative, free from prejudice and validated by research, was difficult to reconcile with the attribution to

15 Council of Europe, *Multiperspectivity in History Teaching: A Guide for Teachers* (Strasbourg, 2003).

16 Council of Europe, 'List of Recommendations' (n.d.).

history of an ethical, unifying role.¹⁷ The solution that gradually emerged at the turn of the century was to broaden the narrative horizon (to include the condition of women, minorities and disadvantaged groups) and, more generally, to shift the focus from a linear, top-down pan-European narrative to reflections on the human problems and experiences that transcend borders.

The ethics of remembrance: a shared syntax for educational policies

Two key phenomena characterise the transition to the new millennium in terms of the pan-European reflection on ‘historical consciousness’ (a concept developed in educational thinking during this process) that schools were called upon to cultivate. On the one hand, interest seems to have shifted from the scientific accuracy of teaching and the inclusion of ‘European’ content in national curricula towards the emotional impact of history and the individual construction of meaning—both in the classroom and in society in a broader sense. Even when these phenomena are met with concern (as in the case of the influence of ‘fake news’ spread by social media), it is the individual’s relationship with history—and the moral status of its elaboration—that is emphasised. On the other hand, politics seems to have embraced the idea of a useful history, capable of strengthening civic cohesion on the basis of universal values, giving credit to the therapeutic function of confronting the traumas of the last century. In both cases, ‘memory’ is the key concept: it is in reference to its intrinsic value that the discourse on the public utility of history is articulated. Completely absent from the transnational debate on the teaching of history in previous decades, this theme has quietly emerged in conversations among actors in the world of education, initially through a sharper sensitivity to the tangible traces of social wounds—victims, eyewitnesses, charismatic places and so on—rather than as an articulated concept. In recent decades, the transformative potential of memory and commemoration has gained a central role in the achievement of the objectives of historical education in

17 P. Garcia, ‘Vers une politique mémorielle européenne?’, in R. Frank et al. (eds.), *Building a European Public Sphere: From the 1950s to the Present* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2011).

society at large, as demonstrated by its use in the most influential political forums, from the European Parliament to the Commission.¹⁸ In my opinion, this has elevated these concepts into true unifying factors in the European consciousness.

This argument needs to be substantiated with specific historical references. The emergence of transnational cooperation on education to memorialise the genocide of the Jews is the most striking example: this was the first proposal to use knowledge of recent history in a transformative way, going beyond national borders, and the most sophisticated in terms of the resources—both symbolic and material—put in place. The Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research, established in 1998, is the matrix of this effort, which directly engages national education systems in practical action. The initiative was initially driven by a few Western countries (Sweden, the UK and the US, and later joined by four other European countries and Israel)—but its underlying motives, including preventing the resurgence of xenophobic sentiment in society, and its ambition, look far beyond this horizon. The organisation, later known as the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), soon involved Eastern European governments and societies in the commemorative scheme that had been conceived in the West in previous decades. On 27 January 2001 delegates from 47 countries signed the ‘Stockholm Declaration’ on Holocaust education, committing themselves to including the Holocaust in their respective educational schemes: this founding document still serves as a compass for the IHRA’s activities.¹⁹ Over the course of just a few years, the goal of linking the active memory of this tragedy to explicit educational objectives gained unanimous support in the European political arena. Before 1999 only two countries, France and Germany, had established a Holocaust Remembrance Day. In 2002 a formal request to follow suit was submitted by the CoE to its 44 member states, and the European Parliament (followed by the OECD) submitted a similar request in 2005. By 2010, 25 European countries had agreed to the request, and 18 of them now celebrate the

18 See European Parliament and Council, Decision no. 1904/2006/EC establishing for the period 2007 to 2013 the programme ‘Europe for Citizens’ to promote active European citizenship, OJ L378 (27 December 2006), 32, action 4: ‘Active European Remembrance’.

19 IHRA, ‘Stockholm Declaration’ (n.d.).

event on the same day.²⁰

For about a decade, increasingly coordinated pressure has been exerted on curriculum writers and teachers. In 2014 the IHRA could count on the active participation of the majority (14) of the former Communist bloc countries: the memory of an absolute crime had made it possible to break seemingly invincible national idiosyncrasies. Above all, mobilisation to implement the objectives of the Stockholm Declaration was met with a responsiveness among teachers and students on a scale unknown in previous attempts to raise public awareness of ‘European’ issues.²¹ The politicisation of Holocaust-related initiatives usually shows a pattern whereby the growing involvement of policymakers in memory policies is matched by growing social ‘demand’ for educational spaces dedicated to remembrance. In Sweden, this resulted in the publication of an educational book, of which 1.7 million copies were printed in 8 languages, circulated to every home with children of school age. In Italy, the establishment of a Remembrance Day in 2001 has been marked—to date—by initiatives organised in all educational institutions, a highly successful essay competition for students and an enormous increase in ‘memory trips’ (*viaggi della memoria*) to extermination sites, with up to 50,000 pupils involved per year between 2001 and 2014.²²

As is well known, the generalisation of educational goals and commemorative rituals related to the Holocaust has also given rise to different, if not openly antagonistic, claims. Since the 2004 enlargement, European memory policy has been dominated by anxiety about bridging the gap between the divergent experiences of the Second World War across Western and Eastern Europe. Holocaust remembrance culture has reinvigorated demands to address the insufficient awareness of the human cost of Communist totalitarianism. The institutional response has had limited results: the

20 L. F. Allwork, ‘Holocaust Remembrance as “Civil Religion”’, in T. Schult and D. Popescu (eds.), *Revisiting Holocaust Representation in the Post-Witness Era* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

21 See F. Foret, *Légitimer l’Europe* (Paris: Presse de Sciences Po, 2008).

22 P. S. Colla, ‘La storia dei genocidi come educazione civica?’, in M. Angelini et al., *A scuola di cittadinanza* (Florence: Editpress, 2024).

founding of a new memorial canon, or a new pan-European commemorative date (such as 23 August²³), on the rejection of all forms of totalitarianism has proved ineffective in terms of its impact on educational practices. Greater success, however, has been achieved with the introduction into curricula of other forms of commemoration linked to the memory of a specific trauma affecting one nation: for example, in Italy, commemoration of the expulsion of ethnic Italians from the territories handed over to Yugoslavia (10 February, *Giorno del ricordo*).

Despite the fragile and divisive nature of the ideological construction of a shared memory, references to the genocide and racial persecution of the 1930s and 1940s have become an established part of European school curricula, as evidenced by comparative studies.²⁴ In this context, one instructive aspect is national diversification of the ways in which this pedagogy is framed. The educational use of memory has proven to be adaptive. In some countries the Holocaust is clearly experienced as a tragic event in the collective memory, while in others it is considered something that happened ‘elsewhere’. In some, it is narratively associated with the colonial experience or an inner political crisis, while in others it is constructed as a pedagogical object in its own right. Can a European pattern be discerned within this diversity? A number of features—including the focus on victims and the redemptive function attributed to their commemoration—undoubtedly stand out as a common cultural trait. The transnational objectives of remembrance policies have been clearly defined: not only to stem the tide of oblivion, but also to build bridges between the living—for example, by overcoming the gap in sensitivity towards different forms of racism between member countries, with a view to enlargement. Remembrance of the Shoah has almost never been separated from simultaneous shifts in understanding of the common past: in France, it was linked to a critical reinterpretation of the self-absolving myth of the Resistance; in Italy, to rehabilitation of the fate of Italian civilian deportees in Nazi Germany. In many contexts, rituals linked to memory have often led to the rediscovery

23 European Parliament, Resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism.

24 See Z. Gross and E. D. Stevick (eds.), *As the Witnesses Fall Silent: 21st Century Holocaust Education in Curriculum, Policy and Practice* (New York: Springer, 2015).

of heroic stories of individual resistance to totalitarianism and civic courage.

The preventive goal of raising awareness of human rights which the Stockholm Declaration assigns to Holocaust education is echoed in a variety of other forms of remembrance education that have come into being. The stigmatisation of intolerance draws on the memory of the genocide of the Jews as support, and has prompted a multitude of social actors to step out from social invisibility and come to the fore. The educational activities funded by the Living History Forum (a public educational authority established in Sweden before the launch of the International Task Force) symbolise this multiplier effect very well. The experiences of other local minorities—for example, the Roma and the Sami—as well as dark episodes of state-sponsored ethnic discrimination (e.g. the forced sterilisations of the 1930s and 1940s) and political crimes on a global scale (from the Holodomor to the Cambodian genocide of 1975–9) are officially covered by the agency's remit, which is to act as a promoter for the universal values of social inclusion. In all these areas, public agency has also acted as a stimulus for historical research, providing material for schools.

Memory—as Michael Rothberg has rightly observed—is not a zero-sum game.²⁵ In its reframing in scholastic settings, the focus on Holocaust memory has freed up space for further memories, which have become the object of civic liturgies of the same kind. In the case of Italy, such a fate has befallen the memory of the victims of the Mafia crimes and political terrorism of the 1970s. The 12 different commemorative dates decreed since 2001 have paved the way for inclusion of these events in teaching practices, following a familiar path: conveying an ethical message through historical trauma to those generations who did not directly experience it. This process substitutes identification and empathy with blurred experience to guarantee future social cohesion. Such a dynamic somewhat validates the criticisms directed at the pan-European rhetoric of memory in schools. Recent history provides abundant examples of the institutional instrumentalisation of memory: the inflation of memorials

25 'The result of memory conflict is not less memory, but more'; M. Rothberg, 'From Gaza to Warsaw: Mapping Multidirectional Memory', *Criticism* (Autumn 2011), 523.

and commemorative days, when used as propaganda tools, can hinder a critical re-examination of the past, perpetuating stereotypical representations of past conflicts.²⁶

The plan of rallying Europeans around a sacralised historical canon has proven to be a chimera. However, one may wonder whether the obsessive search for synthesis is not just the result of a misunderstanding of the deepest roots of European identity. ‘Europe,’ as Foret reminds us, ‘has been more of a container than a content’.²⁷ Foret’s account of the fierce opposition to any EU intrusion into the symbolic dimension of national education policies—such as the failure in the early 1990s to draft a single European history textbook—leads to an insight: memory policies have succeeded in permeating the ethos of European education systems more deeply and effectively than any propaganda supporting the federal ideal has ever been able to achieve. Without claiming to embody a new transnational standard, they have discreetly supported the intuition of the founding fathers: that the old continent must find the reasons for its unity in the tragedies of its past. In its various forms, this has produced a more integrated educational style to which educational actors have spontaneously adapted: it is an example of soft governance, based on *interpellation* (as understood by Louis Althusser) and expertise sharing, which has already regulated European advancements in cultural cooperation.²⁸

26 S. van der Poel, ‘Memory Crisis: The Shoah Within a Collective European Memory’, *Journal of European Studies* 49/3–4 (2019), 267–81.

27 ‘Davantage un contenant qu’un contenu’; Foret, *Légitimer l’Europe*, 68.

28 L. Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)’, in L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: New Left Press, 1971). See also P. S. Colla, *Le capitali europee della cultura*, vol. III (Rome: Treccani, 2018).

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About the author

Piero S. Colla is a contemporary historian who studied at the University of Bologna and holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*, Paris. He is a research associate with the Modern and Contemporary Worlds unit at the *Université Libre de Bruxelles* and with the Germanic and Northern European Worlds research centre at the University of Strasbourg. He has taught History Education at the University of Bologna and Political History at the University of Strasbourg. Since 2006, he has served as an administrator for the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels. His research focuses on national mythologies and collective identities; the cultural dimension of the Scandinavian welfare state; and the interplay between memory, school practices and curricula in history and civic education from a comparative perspective. On these themes, he co-directed the interdisciplinary seminar *The Crisis in History Teaching in Europe?* and currently coordinates the transnational project *Youth and History 2025–2026*.



The European Parliament as a Peace Actor:

Influence or Power?

Alfredo De Feo and Giovanni Giangiobbe¹

1 We would like to thank Johan Ryngaert for his comments and Edward Lynch for his linguistic and editing revision.

The question of whether the European Parliament possesses power or merely influence as a peace actor constitutes the central analytical thread of this chapter. This distinction serves as a guiding framework for assessing the Parliament's evolving role within the EU's external action. Using selected empirical examples, it shows how the Parliament has gradually evolved from relying mainly on moral and political influence to exercising more concrete and institutionalised forms of power.

Indeed, the evolution of the Parliamentary Assembly represents one of the most significant trajectories of European integration. Conceived as a consultative body, the Parliament remained, in constitutional terms, a secondary actor, even after the first direct elections to it in 1979. Nevertheless, it consistently sought to expand its political influence, frequently acting beyond its formal competences through the production of reports, resolutions and recommendations addressing key policy issues.

This progressive increase of political influence and legislative powers fostered a new institutional culture: the Commission and Council could no longer ignore parliamentary positions without risking legislative deadlock. As a result, cross-party coalition building, structured inter-institutional negotiations and trilogues became central features of EU law-making, integrating the Parliament firmly into the legislative architecture.

Europe and peace

The concepts of Europe and peace have always been connected and, as described in the introduction to this publication, this connection is deeply rooted in intellectual and political history. In 1849, amidst an unstable and conflict-ridden period for the continent, Victor Hugo, addressing the Congrès de la Paix in Paris, famously called for the creation of a 'United States of Europe' as an antidote to war. He envisaged a day 'when the only battlefield will be markets that will open to trade and minds that will open to ideas'.² This is a vision that remains strikingly contemporary.

2 V. Hugo, opening speech at the Congrès de la Paix, Paris, 21 August 1849.

A century later, in 1944, new visionary leaders revived this aspiration. Altiero Spinelli, Ernesto Rossi and Eugenio Colorni, imprisoned on the island of Ventotene, articulated in their *Manifesto* the necessity of creating a politically united Europe founded on federal principles, liberty and peace.³

Later, in September 1946, Winston Churchill, at Zurich University, urged France and Germany to enter into a partnership as the first step in building ‘a kind of United States of Europe. There can be no revival of Europe without a spiritually great France and a spiritually great Germany’.⁴

Finally, the political courage and ability of the founding fathers of Europe, Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer and Alcide de Gasperi, translated the ideas of peace, freedom and economic integration into political action. By coupling peace with economic interdependence, they laid the foundations for institutions that would make another intra-European war materially impossible. As a result, the very concept of the EU became synonymous with peace and freedom, values that transcended ideological divisions and provided a unifying rationale for integration, as described by Jacopo Cellini elsewhere in this volume.

European values

The EU is founded not only on economic and political integration, but also on a shared set of values (including democracy, freedom and peace) that underpin its legitimacy and institutional action. Within this framework, the European Parliament has consistently assumed a central role in the defence and promotion of these values, positioning itself as the Union’s moral and normative authority.

Parliament’s activity has led to the protection of values being linked to the legitimacy of European governance. Through resolutions, debates and hearings, it has drawn attention to democratic backsliding and fundamental rights violations, both within

3 A. Spinelli and E. Rossi, *For a Free and United Europe: A Draft Manifesto (Ventotene Manifesto)*, 1941.

4 F. Klos, ‘Finest Hour 173’, *WinstonChurchill.org*, 14 August 2016.

and outside the Union, contributing, over time, to the institutionalisation of budget conditionality and other value-protection procedures and mechanisms, such as Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union.⁵ In parallel, the Parliament has projected the EU's normative identity externally, by condemning human rights violations in third countries and supporting democratic actors abroad, thereby reinforcing the Union's soft power. Overall, the Parliament's sustained advocacy has transformed the EU's foundational principles into operational standards that now define the EU's identity, demonstrating an influence that often exceeds its formal powers.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights

Peace within the EU is not conceived as a standalone concept, but as an integral component of a broader and interdependent set of European values (democracy, justice, freedom and peace), which together form the foundation of the fundamental rights. From an early stage, the European Parliament demonstrated a strong commitment to the defence of these values through its political activism. Notable examples include its protest against the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, its condemnation of Soviet repression in Czechoslovakia, and its support for the democratic transitions in Spain and Portugal during the late-Cold War period. This activism was formally acknowledged in 1977, when the national governments invited the Parliament to participate, alongside the Commission, in one of the first joint declarations on the respect for fundamental rights within the European Community.

The Parliament's influence further expanded after the Maastricht Treaty. In this context, the Parliament increasingly linked respect for fundamental rights to external relations, as illustrated by its refusal in 1992 to ratify the Customs Union agreement with Turkey due to human rights concerns. Although the Amsterdam Treaty did not

5 Art. 7 of the Treaty on European Union serves as the EU's 'nuclear option' for protecting the fundamental values enshrined in art. 2 of the same (respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights). The procedure was incorporated by the Treaty of Amsterdam and later strengthened by the Treaty of Nice to include preventative measures before breaches actually occur. See European Parliament, Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services, 'Article 7 TEU: A Mechanism to Protect EU Values', 7 October 2013.

grant the European Parliament a formal role in treaty ratification, or in the final decision-making process for treaty revision, several Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), including Íñigo Méndez de Vigo and Dimitris Tsatsos, actively participated in the preparatory debates, expert discussions and inter-institutional consultations that preceded the Intergovernmental Conference. Through these informal channels, they were able to contribute to the development of proposals and to influence broader debates on the protection of fundamental rights within the EU. Their involvement thus helped to ensure that concerns related to democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights remained prominent throughout the negotiation process, and some of these priorities were subsequently reflected in the final treaty provisions.

This approach culminated in the Parliament taking a central role in paving the way to the signing of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Following the Cologne European Council in 1999, the Parliament actively contributed to the Convention process, despite its numerical disadvantage vis-à-vis the national parliaments. The cohesion and strategic leadership of the European Parliament's delegation proved decisive in building a consensus and influencing the final text, reinforcing the Parliament's role as a key normative actor in embedding fundamental rights at the core of the EU's constitutional identity.

Although the Parliament had played a significant role in the drafting of the Charter, it was dissatisfied with its initial legal status, as the document was proclaimed in 2000 without being incorporated into the treaties and therefore lacked binding legal force. Inspired by the Schuman Declaration's logic of gradual integration through 'small steps', the Parliament continued to advocate for the Charter to acquire the same legal value as the treaties.⁶ The Charter's status changed fundamentally with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. By granting the Charter the same legal value as the treaties, the aforementioned Treaty provided the Court of Justice with a direct legal instrument for assessing compliance with fundamental rights within the scope of EU law.

6 European Parliament, *Resolution on the Drafting of a European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights* (A5-0064/2000), OJ C377 (29 December 2000), 79; and European Parliament, *Resolution on the Charter of Fundamental Rights* (TA-5-2000-0416), OJ .

Although the Charter was initially a non-binding instrument, granting it a stronger legal status carried significant symbolic and political weight. Even before acquiring binding force, the Charter represented a clear statement of the values and principles on which the Union sought to base its political and legal order. Strengthening its status therefore reinforced the credibility of the EU's commitment to the protection of fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law. It also strengthened the normative benchmarks applied in accession negotiations with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, providing candidate states with a more visible and coherent framework of standards to which they were expected to align their institutions, legislation and administrative practices as part of the accession process.

The Sakharov Prize

The Sakharov Prize is a striking symbol of Parliament's commitment to human rights. In awarding the prize each year, Europe pays tribute to individuals and organisations demonstrating a wholehearted commitment to standing up for the universal values officially recognised by the UN.

Sakharov Prize winners are often icons of non-violent struggle against dictatorships or discrimination. In awarding them the prize for freedom of thought, the European Parliament is also honouring all those people—known and unknown—who are engaged in the struggle for a fairer, more humane society.⁷

The Sakharov Prize takes its name from Andrei Sakharov, a Soviet physicist who in the 1970s became an international icon for the defence of peace and human rights after renouncing nuclear weapons and opposing authoritarianism. From the early 1980s, the European Parliament sought to institutionalise his legacy, culminating in the establishment of an annual prize, supported by all political groups and personally

7 M. Schulz, 'Foreword', in P. Vainiomäki (ed.), *25 Years of the Sakharov Prize* (November 2013), 5.

endorsed by Sakharov in 1987.⁸ The inclusive selection procedure,⁹ involving MEPs, parliamentary committees and political groups, reflects the prize's broad political legitimacy.

Although the Sakharov Prize has no formal legislative or diplomatic effect, it has become a powerful instrument of parliamentary influence. By granting international visibility to dissidents, civil society actors and persecuted communities, it amplifies their voices, enhances their protection and, in some cases, contributes to concrete political outcomes, such as increased international pressure on authoritarian regimes or the release of prisoners. More broadly, the prize allows the European Parliament to assert itself as the moral conscience of the Union, often acting more boldly than other EU institutions on human rights issues. In doing so, it also illustrates how the Parliament can transcend its formal competences through moral authority and normative leadership, reinforcing both the EU's global image as a defender of universal rights and the Parliament's own legitimacy.

Conflict prevention and mediation

Although the European Parliament lacks formal competences in conflict prevention and mediation, it has nonetheless developed a meaningful capacity to influence the EU's approach to peace and security.¹⁰ Indeed, through resolutions, debates and reports, the Parliament has often anticipated, or complemented, the initiatives of the EU's executive institutions, contributing to the recognition of conflict prevention as a core dimension of EU external action. In particular, it has consistently emphasised the need to address the structural causes of conflict—such as poverty, inequality, weak governance and human rights violations—and has advocated greater investment in

8 European Parliament, *Resolution on the Creation of a Sakharov Prize*, OJ C352 (31 December 1985), 282, 304, 323.

9 European Parliament (Enlarged Bureau), *The Statute of the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought*, 6 July 1988, *Amended by the Decision of the Conference of Presidents of 5 July 2001*.

10 For a general approach, see B. Immenkamp and N. Bentzen, 'Parliamentary Diplomacy: Democracy Support at the European Parliament', in O. Costa (ed.), *The European Parliament in Times of EU Crisis* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan).

preventative diplomacy, civilian missions and capacity-building in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

A distinctive feature of the European Parliament's parliamentary diplomacy lies in its relative autonomy from governmental constraints, allowing it to articulate stronger political positions than those typically adopted by executive actors.¹¹ The Parliament has also played a visible role in mediation support through dedicated structures that facilitate dialogue with political actors and civil society in regions affected by instability, thereby reinforcing the EU's profile as a peace actor.

This activism was consolidated by a 2019 resolution¹² which systematically integrated conflict prevention and mediation into EU foreign policy and enhanced institutional capacity, paving the way for revised Commission guidelines and their incorporation into the EU's conflict-prevention and peace-building framework. Beyond normative influence, the Parliament exercises tangible power through its budgetary role, notably by securing financing for the thematic programme on human rights and democracy (€1.5 billion for 2021–7), which supports civil society actors, even in the absence of host government consent.

European Parliament delegations

The system of parliamentary delegations constitutes one of the most important instruments through which the European Parliament extends its presence beyond the borders of the Union. These delegations, sent to parliaments in candidate countries, neighbouring states and strategic partners worldwide, allow MEPs to engage directly with foreign political actors.

11 See W. Gagatsek, 'Values, Strategies, Actions: The EPP Group and EU External Relations', in L. Bardi et al., *The European Ambition: The Group of the European People's Party and European Integration* (Nomos, 2020), 208: '[t]his usually results in much stronger opinions on various issues than the Commission or Council can afford due to the limits of traditional diplomacy.'

12 European Parliament, *Motion for a Resolution on Building EU Capacity on Conflict Prevention and Mediation* (2018/2159(INI)), 11 February 2019.

While these exchanges do not produce binding commitments, they function as effective channels of parliamentary diplomacy. Through dialogue, fact-finding visits and interparliamentary cooperation, delegations contribute to the diffusion of European values, particularly democracy, the rule of law and human rights. In this way, the Parliament wields influence that often exceeds its formal competences: MEPs can raise sensitive issues, express solidarity with civil society and exert moral pressure on partner governments.

Through delegations, MEPs have the opportunity not only to share their values but also to understand the positions taken by other parliaments and governments. Even if delegation meetings are perceived as fora for discussion, they also become a platform for defence of the European values of democracy and human rights. While their direct impact is, apparently, minimal, delegations not only contribute to general awareness and pressure to change course in various parts of the world, but also provide a conduit for the financial resources allocated by the EU budget in support of democracy, respect of human rights and, ultimately, peace.

The work of parliamentary delegations is often supported by resolutions adopted by the Parliament. Given their large number, it is impossible to discuss individual cases in detail: between 1963 and 1988, the Parliament adopted more than 200 resolutions on Latin America, many of which reflected concerns raised through interparliamentary contacts and focused on human rights, democracy and peace processes.¹³

In spite of its distinctive contribution to the achievement of EU foreign and security policy goals, as well as the added value and complementarity provided by parliamentary diplomacy, the Parliament has yet to be fully recognised by the Commission, the Council and the European External Action Service as an integral player within the ‘Team Europe’ approach.¹⁴

13 A. Barahona de Brito, *The European Parliament and the Human Rights Situation in Latin America*, European Parliament Working Paper (March 1999).

14 See European Parliament, *Resolution on the Role of the European Parliament and Its Parliamentary Diplomacy in the EU's Foreign and Security Policy* (2023/2105(INI)), 16 January 2024.

Thus, Parliament still has great untapped potential to further develop its diplomatic role and contributions to the achievement of EU foreign and security policy objectives.

Electoral observation

Electoral observation has become one of the European Parliament's most visible instruments for promoting democracy and legitimacy abroad. Since the 1990s, the Parliament has systematically participated in international election observation missions, often in partnership with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe or under the broader umbrella of EU missions coordinated by the European External Action Service.

The Parliament's involvement in these missions does not confer power in the strict legal sense: observation teams cannot alter electoral outcomes or impose sanctions. Yet, their influence is considerable. By assessing the fairness and transparency of the electoral processes, issuing public reports and providing recommendations, the Parliament reinforces democratic standards and lends credibility to electoral processes in fragile democracies.

Moreover, the presence of MEPs on the ground sends a strong symbolic message. It demonstrates the Union's commitment to democratic values and often provides reassurance to local civil society actors and political opposition groups. In some cases, the Parliament's reports and recommendations have shaped the EU's subsequent political and financial engagement with the country in question, demonstrating the indirect impact of these missions on the Union's external policies.

By acting as the Union's democratic ambassador in third countries, the Parliament extends its reach well beyond the confines of its formal competences and affirms its role as a guardian of democracy. Its electoral observation missions are considered a successful preventative diplomacy tool, with over 200 missions having been deployed in more than 75 countries since 2000.

The Civilian Compact

The Civilian Compact, adopted by the Council of the European Union in 2023,¹⁵ builds upon the first EU Civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Compact (2018), which established the initial framework for strengthening the civilian dimension of the CSDP. Indeed, it aims to strengthen the effectiveness, impact, flexibility and robustness of civilian missions within the EU's CSDP. This initiative responds to the emerging security challenges, including geopolitical tensions, climate change and transnational threats, particularly in light of recent conflicts in Europe.

The idea of creating a civilian intervention corps stems from a long battle led by the European Parliament, started by Alexander Langer (Greens) in the early 1990s, to enhance the role of civilians in re-establishing mutual trust and dialogue between communities divided by conflict. In 1995 the idea was taken up by the Parliament when it adopted the Bourlanges–Martin Report.¹⁶ This proposal was presented by the European Parliament delegation to the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference, which rejected it.

The idea re-emerged 20 years later and is now part of the activities of the European External Action Service. By the time it was finally implemented, however, its original proposers had passed away, making this a posthumous vindication of their proposal.

In recent years, civilian missions have involved more than 2,000 personnel across 13 missions aimed at promoting global security, responding to crises and strengthening the resilience of partner countries.

15 Council of the EU, *Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, Meeting Within the Council, on the Establishment of a Civilian CSDP Compact*, 9588/23 (Brussels, 22 May 2023).

16 The resolution recognised the role of civil society, stating that 'a first step towards conflict prevention could be the creation of a European civilian peace corps . . . whose task would be to train observers, mediators and conflict resolution specialists'. See European Parliament, *Resolution on the Functioning of the Treaty on European Union With a View to the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference – Implementation and Development of the Union*, OJ C151 (19 June 1995), 56. Rapporteurs: Jean-Louis Bourlanges and David Martin.

A special case: John Hume and the PEACE programme for Northern Ireland

Elsewhere in this volume, Guy Banim describes the role of the EU in the development of policy in favour of the pacification of the two communities of Northern Ireland.

Indeed, the European Parliament played a significant role in supporting the Northern Ireland peace process, notably through its political activism and budgetary powers. Central to this engagement was John Hume, MEP from 1979 to 2004, who consistently promoted reconciliation, dialogue and European involvement in resolving the conflict. Well before the formal establishment of the PEACE programme in 1995, Hume mobilised cross-party support within the Parliament to address intercommunal violence.¹⁷

A key milestone was the Parliament's adoption of the Haagerup Report in 1984,¹⁸ which advocated power-sharing between the communities and enhanced cooperation between the British and Irish governments. Despite strong opposition from Unionist representatives, particularly Ian Paisley, the report signalled growing European support for a negotiated solution. This position likely contributed to the British government's decision, under Margaret Thatcher, to sign the Anglo-Irish Agreement, marking the first step towards joint British–Irish management of the Northern Ireland issue.

Throughout the 1980s, despite political antagonism, Northern Irish MEPs—including Hume, Paisley and John Taylor—cooperated to lobby for European financial assistance to address the region's conflict-damaged economy.¹⁹ This cooperation laid the groundwork for the PEACE programme, which has continued through successive funding cycles and currently operates as Peace Plus 2021–7, with combined EU, UK and Irish funding exceeding €1 billion.

17 A. Christie, *John Hume, Northern Ireland's Peace-Maker and Committed European*, European Parliamentary Research Service Briefing, PE 733.515 (June 2022).

18 N. J. Haagerup, *Report on the Situation in Northern Ireland*, European Parliament Working Document 1-1526/83 (19 March 1984).

19 See D. Phinnemore, 'Northern Ireland: 40 Years of EU Membership', *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 8/4 (2012).

Hume's sustained efforts culminated in his receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1998, shared with David Trimble, in recognition of their roles in achieving a peaceful settlement. Overall, the European Parliament's long-term commitment significantly contributed to the success²⁰ of the Northern Ireland peace process, reinforcing Ireland's status as a European success story.

Si vis Pacem

Preparing this chapter in October 2025, I cannot fail to refer to the incredible acceleration of the threat to peace for all European countries. The changes in geopolitical relations on the Western front, with the military disengagement of the US; on the Eastern front, with the expansionist aggressiveness of Russia; and on the Middle Eastern front, with the worsening of instability; not to mention the trade tensions with and geopolitical pressures applied by other actors such as China and India, are all elements threatening security and peace.

Awareness of the fragility of European security and of the risks has risen very high on the agendas of European leaders, including those of the UK. In reaction, the European Parliament voted on an unambiguous resolution that fully supports the Commission's initiatives.²¹ The resolution received the support of 63% of the Parliament, but despite this, it remains more an indicator of influence than of power.

At the moment, the prevailing orientation is that most of the legislation introduced by the Commission will be based on Article 122 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which allows the Council to adopt economic policy measures based on a qualified majority basis, thus excluding the European Parliament from the legislative procedure. This approach, if confirmed, would put the democratic accountability of

20 S. Kelly, '50 Years Later, Ireland Is a True Success Story', *EPP Group*, 16 January 2023.

21 The European Parliament resolution states, in short, that the EU must act urgently to ensure its own autonomous security, strengthening its partnerships with like-minded partners and significantly reducing its dependencies on non-EU countries. It stresses, therefore, that the EU is now at a turning point in its history and construction and insists that a 'business as usual' approach is no longer an option. See European Parliament, *Resolution on the White Paper on the Future of European Defence* (2025/2565(RSP), 12 March 2025.

the Council's decisions at risk. The true involvement of the European Parliament would probably require greater communication efforts, but having the support of public opinion, through the votes of the European assembly, would strengthen the policies that the EU will have to carry out to ensure that Europe remains a continent of peace.

The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the EU in 2012 was recognition of the success of the European project. The prize committee noted the role played by the EU in bringing peace to a continent that, for centuries, had seen almost every generation experience major conflicts.²² By promoting cooperation through economic projects and finding legal means of solving disagreements or conflicts, the EU has been crucial in building trust among the European nations. The awarding of the Nobel Prize was also a recognition of the continuous role played by all the EU institutions. The European Parliament has always been a constant stimulus of and support to peace.

Conclusion

The chapter has demonstrated how the European Parliament has progressively moved from a position characterised primarily by moral and political authority to one having more substantive and formalised competences, enabling it to exercise tangible influence over decision-making processes and, in certain domains, to wield genuine institutional power in shaping the EU's peace-related policies.

This evolution has been achieved not only through treaty reforms, but also thanks to sustained political initiative and normative leadership. Indeed, the Parliament's growing authority is grounded in its role as the only institution that directly represents European citizens, a source of legitimacy which has enabled it to shape both institutional practices and the Union's values framework.

The Parliament's contribution lies in its capacity to embed peace, democracy

22 T. Jagland, speech made at the awarding of the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize to the EU, Oslo, 10 December 2012: 'The EU has constantly been a central driving force throughout these processes of reconciliation. The EU has in fact helped to bring about both the "fraternity between nations" and the "promotion of peace congresses" of which Alfred Nobel wrote in his will.'

and fundamental rights at the core of the European project. Through its external actions, symbolic instruments and persistent advocacy, it has helped to define the EU's identity as a global actor, whose influence is primarily based on norms and principles, rather than coercive power.

In an international context characterised by conflicts and declining multilateralism, this role acquires a heightened strategic relevance. By linking security, democracy and accountability, the Parliament acts as a safeguard against the risk that the Union's evolving security attitude might erode its foundational commitment to peace and human dignity.

Lastly, the history of the European Parliament demonstrates that institutional influence does not depend only on formal authority, but also on the ability to articulate shared values and sustain them over time. In this sense, the Parliament remains a key guardian of the EU's normative orientation and an essential pillar of its enduring peace-building vocation.

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About the authors

Alfredo De Feo is currently Scientific Director of and a Professor at the European College of Parma Foundation. Between 2014 and 2025, Alfredo was a Research Fellow at both the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and the Alcide de Gasperi Centre Historical Archives of the European Union (both at the European University Institute, Florence). He was also the Distinguished Émile Noël Global Fellow at New York University. Prior to this, he worked for the European Parliament in a variety of positions, mainly relating to the European budget and in research services.

Giovanni Giangiobbe is currently an academic assistant at the European College of Parma Foundation, where he teaches courses titled 'Introduction to European Union Law' and 'Nudge and Food Habits'. Furthermore, he leads seminars at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart (Milan and Piacenza) on EU law and law for food and fashion. He holds a Ph.D. on the agri-food system from the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart (Piacenza). He has a Master's degree in Law and a Master qualification (level II) in European Studies.



The Miracle of European Peace, and How We Blew it

Philippe Van Parijs

A Franco-German philosophical convergence

As a philosopher, I can make no claim to being an expert on peace—or anything else. But several philosophers discussed this matter long before the birth of the disciplines that are now making peace their preserve. For example, before zooming in on the specific theme of this volume—European peace—it is useful to remember a famous passage in Montesquieu's *Esprit des Lois* (1748):

[I]t is almost a general rule that wherever there are gentle customs, there is commerce; and wherever there is commerce, there are gentle customs. . . . The natural effect of commerce is to lead to peace. Two nations that trade with each other make themselves reciprocally dependent: if one has an interest in buying, the other has an interest in selling; and all unions are based on mutual needs.¹

The claim expressed in this passage became known as the *doux commerce* thesis. Montesquieu was not the only major eighteenth-century philosopher to defend it. Fifty years later, in his essay 'On Perpetual Peace', Immanuel Kant also endorsed it:

The spirit of commerce cannot coexist with war. It is this spirit that sooner or later takes hold of every people. . . . From then on, states feel compelled (admittedly, not exactly for moral reasons) to promote noble peace and, wherever war threatens to break out in the world, to repel it through mediation. . . . Thus, through the very mechanism of human inclinations, nature guarantees perpetual peace.²

An even more forceful formulation of the *doux commerce* thesis can be found in Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man*, published four years earlier:

In all my publications, I have been an advocate for commerce, because I am a friend to its effects. It is a pacific system, operating to cordialise mankind, by rendering nations, as well as individuals, useful to each other. . . . If commerce

1 Montesquieu, *L'Esprit des lois*, vol. 2 (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1979), 9. Author's translation.

2 I. Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf*, 227. Author's translation.

were permitted to act to the universal extent it is capable, it would extirpate the system of war, and produce a revolution in the uncivilised state of governments. The invention of commerce has arisen since those governments began, and is the greatest approach towards universal civilisation that has yet been made by any means not immediately flowing from moral principles.³

Fighting protectionism for the sake of peace

Vacuous philosophical speculations? Perhaps not. As John Maynard Keynes famously wrote at the very end of his magnum opus: ‘The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by nothing else.’⁴ Indeed, it did not take long before someone turned the *doux commerce* claim from a philosophical speculation into a principle of action.

In 1815, after 15 years of Napoleonic wars and with Waterloo looming, the UK adopted protectionist legislation on grain imports, the Corn Laws. Intellectually armed by David Ricardo’s *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817),⁵ the Anti-Corn Law League was founded in 1838, with the Manchester industrialist Richard Cobden as its driving force and the magazine *The Economist*, founded in 1843, as its propaganda tool. The anti-protectionists won and the Corn Laws were abolished in 1846.

In defence of free international trade, Cobden appealed not only to its impact on economic efficiency but also to its impact on peace between nations, especially between the great hereditary enemies, France and England.⁶ He was among the initiators of

3 T. Paine, *The Life and Major Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. P. S. Foner (New York: Citadel Press, 1974), 400.

4 J. M. Keynes, *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (London: Macmillan, 1936), 383.

5 D. Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (London: Dent & Sons, 1973).

6 One of Cobden’s central arguments in favour of abolishing the Corn Laws was that ‘it would introduce through mutually advantageous international trade a new era of international fellowship and peace’ (A. Briggs, *The Making of Modern England 1783–1867: The Age of Improvement* (London: Longman, 1959), 314).

the International Peace Congresses of London (in 1843) and Brussels (in 1848).⁷ Thanks to stubborn lobbying, he got Gladstone and Napoleon III to sign the Cobden–Chevalier Treaty of January 1860, arguably the world’s first free-trade treaty. Even today, some of France’s popular children’s songs still echo the hostilities between the two countries—think of ‘Malbrouck s’en va-t-en guerre’ and ‘Et merde pour le roi d’Angleterre, qui nous a déclaré la guerre’—but Cobden’s treaty seems to have made them a matter of the past for good.

A Franco-German political deal

There is one street in France named after Richard Cobden. It happens to be located in Jean Monnet’s native city of Cognac. It may therefore not be altogether fanciful to conjecture that Cobden’s engagement, motivated by the *doux commerce* thesis, played some role in producing, 150 years after the striking Franco-German philosophical convergence between Montesquieu and Kant, a major Franco-German political deal between Robert Schuman and Konrad Adenauer, concocted by Jean Monnet.

This deal found its first public expression in the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950. ‘World Peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers that threaten it’, said its first sentence.⁸ And what form should these creative efforts take? ‘In contrast to an international cartel that seeks to exploit national markets through restrictive practices and the preservation of high profits, the proposed organisation will ensure the merging of the markets and the expansion of production.’⁹ This ‘fusion of the markets’ would start with the European Coal and Steel Community, headed by Jean Monnet, and later evolve into the more comprehensive European Economic Community and then into the EU.

7 See D. Nicholls, ‘Richard Cobden and the International Peace Congress 1848–1853’, *Journal of British Studies* 30/4 (October 1991).

8 EU, ‘Schuman Declaration May 1950’ (n.d.).

9 Ibid.

The fusion of the markets, the intensification of trade, the *doux commerce*, has since been widely regarded as having done the job ascribed to it in the Schuman Declaration. On 10 December 2012, the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. When receiving it in his position as president of the EU, José Manuel Barroso described the EU as ‘a successful example of peaceful reconciliation based on economic integration’.¹⁰ And Herman Van Rompuy, then president of the European Council, evoked the EU’s ‘secret weapon’: ‘an unrivalled way of binding our interests so tightly that war becomes materially impossible’.¹¹

It looked as if the EU could parade around the world as a wonderfully successful peace project based on commercial interdependence. But then, in February 2022, came Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The EU soon metamorphosed from a peace project into a war project. Is nothing left of the *doux commerce* thesis, of the foundational claim of European integration?¹²

Trust-building institutions

Drawing this conclusion would be premature. First of all, it is worth pointing out that what would bring peace, according to the Montesquieu–Cobden–Schuman doctrine, is the ‘fusion of the markets’, as initiated in 1952 by the European Coal and Steel community, as opposed to the high-minded proclamation of fundamental rights and common values that characterised the Council of Europe, founded three years earlier. The war that erupted in Europe in 2022 is one between countries that were at the time both members of the Council of Europe, but not members of the EU.

10 H. Van Rompuy and J. M. Barroso, ‘From War to Peace. Nobel Prize Lecture on Behalf of the European Union’, Oslo, 10 December 2012.

11 Ibid.

12 For instructive critical discussions of the *doux commerce* thesis, see A. O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests. Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); T. Isiksel, ‘The Dream of Commercial Peace’, in L. van Middelaar and P. Van Parijs (eds.), *After the Storm. How to Save Democracy in Europe* (Tiel: Lannoo, 2015); and D. S. Grewal, ‘A World-Historical Gamble: The Failure of Neoliberal Globalization’, *American Affairs*, 20 November 2022.

The challenge is deeper, however. For the Montesquieu–Cobden–Schuman strategy of intensified international trade could also be said to have been used, intentionally or otherwise, in the EU’s dealings with Russia. Germany’s *Wandel durch Handel* strategy, commonly associated with Gerhard Schröder and Angela Merkel, did not quite cover the same idea: *Wandel durch Handel* is not synonymous with *Frieden durch Handel*. The change trade was explicitly meant to foster was democratisation, not pacification. But the former is commonly believed to facilitate the latter. And in any case, whether owing to sheer economic interests or to a concern for peace or for democracy, the volume of trade between Russia and the EU grew massively after 1989, further facilitated by Russia’s accession to the WTO in 2012. This impressive growth only stopped in 2014, when the first economic sanctions kicked in, following the annexation of Crimea.

Clearly the *doux commerce* effect, if any, was not powerful enough to prevent armed conflict. Instead of taming aggressive emotions and strategies, commercial interdependence was weaponised by both sides. Does that leave the foundational assumption of the EU in tatters? Not quite. First, it can be plausibly argued that the war would have been more total—and, in particular, Chinese involvement incomparably greater—had it not been for the economic losses expected if all trade had stopped. Second, and above all, the *doux commerce* thesis is best interpreted as stating a facilitating condition, which only becomes a sufficient condition if it is supplemented by the development of the trust-creating institutions called for and prompted by commercial interdependence.

The very motivation of awarding the Peace Prize, as phrased by the Nobel committee, can be interpreted as pointing in this direction. European integration, the Nobel committee said, ‘showed that by building up mutual trust, historical enemies can become close partners’.¹³ How was this achieved? Not through the intensification of intra-European international trade as such, but through the creation and expansion of common institutions: those needed to regulate the common (and later single) market,

13 CBS News, ‘Why Did the European Union Win the Nobel Peace Prize?’, 12 October 2012.

but also many that went very far beyond that. The outcome was a multiplication of initiatives and incentives that have led European citizens to interact, cooperate and collaborate to an ever greater extent across the EU's internal borders.

The formal institutions played a key role in this process: the Commission, the Council of Ministers, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee and, above all, the Parliament. As a directly elected assembly, the European Parliament gathers a wide variety of parliamentarians, representing an even wider variety of citizens. And it manages to trigger even the most unlikely cross-border collaborations such as the gathering, within a single parliamentary group, of a patchwork of xenophobic nationalist parties.

Beyond the formal institutions, cross-border interaction and collaboration happens even more often in pan-European civil society, partly as a direct effect of EU policies such as the Erasmus+ programme or the European university alliances, but also as a response to the need to create cross-border coalitions in order to lobby effectively, whether as farmers or environmentalists, as trade unionists or armament producers.

Even the workshop that led to the present volume is part of this process. When greeting each other, when listening to each other, when smiling at each other, when politely disagreeing with each other, we are part of a powerful trust-building mechanism that generates and maintains cross-border *bienveillance*. This mechanism is far from involving all strata of the European population, but it is also very far from being limited to stiff encounters between diplomats. It is this mechanism that makes war between member states perhaps not 'materially impossible', as Herman Van Rompuy put it, but psychosocially unthinkable.

NATO dissolved? NATO expanded?

The development of trust-generating formal and informal institutions in the wake of European market integration was the structural response to Germany's defeat in 1945. It can rightly be considered not only miraculously successful but also remarkably intelligent. By contrast, the structural response to the Soviet Union's very different

defeat in 1989 can be qualified as pathetic. We—the West—blew it.

It started with allegedly clever Western experts recommending swift privatisation, with two immediate effects: a dramatically impoverished shrinking population and a battalion of fabulously wealthy oligarchs. In parallel, trade expanded and commercial interdependence increased, but no noteworthy effort was made to create trust-building institutions. Quite the opposite.

In the aftermath of the sudden collapse of the Soviet regime, followed in 1991 by the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, one might have thought that NATO had lost its purpose. In 1993 Alain Lamassoure became Minister for European Affairs in the French government headed by Edouard Balladur. He thought that NATO should be dissolved too, but found little support for this view either in his own government or elsewhere in Europe at the time. Why?

No doubt in part because NATO, like any other organisation, wanted to keep going in its own interest and in that of its many employees. But also because several Eastern European countries, still traumatised by their protracted submission to Moscow, wanted every guarantee against the risk of it being revived. For other European countries this risk did not exist, and disbanding NATO should have made sense. But given that the US was covering the bulk of the cost, NATO offered them a very cheap insurance policy against that negligible risk. They offered no resistance. The bold idea of giving up NATO should have excited visionaries of the same calibre as those who had kicked off the European integration process, but it was quietly discarded.

Another bold idea, also considered around that time, experienced the same fate. Instead of dismantling the anti-Soviet military alliance, why not welcome the ailing Russia into it? Presidents Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin both expressed support for the idea in 1994, but Clinton gave it up after a few months because of Republican opposition at home and Germany's lack of enthusiasm.¹⁴

14 K. Wiegrefe, 'How Close Was Russia to NATO Membership?', *Der Spiegel*, 27 August 2025.

Consequently, NATO not only survived but soon expanded to include almost all European components of the former Soviet bloc except Russia: three countries in 1999, then six more in 2004. There followed what, after Putin's 2007 Munich speech, should have been understood by all as supreme provocation. In 2008 President Bush offered NATO membership to Russia's biggest European partner, the country that, among all the former components of the Soviet Union except Belarus, was closest to Russia historically, linguistically, religiously and ethnically: Ukraine.

Fear and humiliation

The state in which Western-steered privatisation had left Russia by the end of the twentieth century had created fertile ground for a strongman who could revive the country's demography and economy and enable Russians to regain national pride. The resulting situation was not that different from the one that had prevailed in Germany after both the First and Second World Wars. But after the Second World War, wisdom and statesmanship had managed to avoid the stupidity of the response to Germany's defeat in 1918.

Alas, this wisdom and statesmanship did not prevail after the more peaceful defeat of the USSR. An expansion of the military alliance all along Russia's western border, with hostility to Russia as its only possible motivation, was understandably perceived as a threat by Russia's leaders and provided them with all that was needed to persuade the Russian population that some pre-emptive action was justified. And if ancient Greek historians and contemporary ethologists are to be believed, there is no more fundamental cause of war than fear.¹⁵

The humiliation caused by warnings not taken seriously can ignite the desire to take aggressive action, and pretexts for such action can easily be found. As early 1994, a referendum held in the oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk found a majority of about 90% in favour of the proposal to make Russian the co-official language

15 See Thucydides' famous passage in Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian Wars*, I.23.6; and C. van Schaik, *Waarom we vrede willen maar oorlog voeren* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2025).

with Ukrainian in this part of Ukraine.¹⁶ Despite this, the 1996 Ukrainian Constitution ignored this request and made Ukrainian the sole official language. Yet, a law passed in 2012 under President Yanukovich opened up the possibility of making Russian the co-official language in regions where at least 10% of the population were Russian speakers. Putin awarded its authors the Pushkin Medal for their ‘great contribution to the preservation and promotion of the Russian language and culture abroad’.¹⁷ However, a small majority (232 out of 450) in the post-Euromaidan Parliament voted to abolish this law on 23 February 2014. Four days later the Crimean parliament was seized by Russian soldiers, and a pro-Russian government was installed. The military hostilities began.

More language legislation followed under Presidents Poroshenko and Zelenskyy, in particular the 2017 law ‘On Education’, the 2019 law ‘On Maintaining the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as a State Language’ and the 2022 law ‘On National Minorities’. This legislation was repeatedly judged by the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission to be discriminatory towards Ukraine’s largest linguistic minority.¹⁸ In *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*, the memoir he published in July 2021, Putin complained that Ukraine’s language policies ‘are simply pushing out Russians and the Russian-speaking population from their historical territories’ and spoke of a ‘war against the Russian language and its speakers’.¹⁹ This ‘war’ has repeatedly been invoked by the Russian authorities since the February 2022 invasion as a justification for Russia’s ‘special operation’.

16 See E. Donetskaya, ‘The Donbass Referendum of 1994, on Which the Whole World Turned a Blind Eye’, *Donbass Insider*, 14 May 2020. Judging by the description, it was a Catalan-type referendum (with less ambitious demands), organised at the initiative of the regional authorities without the backing of the central authorities.

17 Wikipedia.org, ‘Language Policy in Ukraine’ (n.d.).

18 See Venice Commission, ‘Opinion on the Law on Supporting the Ukrainian Language as the State Language’, Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 2019); and Venice Commission, ‘Opinion on the Law on National Minorities’, Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 2023).

19 V. Putin, *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*, President of Russia (12 July 2021).

No second miracle of European peace

Hence, yes, *le commerce peut adoucir les mœurs*, and it could have done so between the EU and Russia after 1989, just as it did between France and Germany after 1945. But it cannot do so on its own. It needs help from a robust superstructure of trust-building institutions, both formal and informal. Its pacifying effects can easily be annihilated, indeed disastrously reversed, by distrust-boosting, humiliating policies. The only thing commercial interdependence then offers is the capacity to damage each other—and oneself in the process—through economic sanctions.

There was, therefore, no second miracle of European peace. Instead, we now find ourselves forced to spend vast amounts of money, largely on American weapons, at the expense of our social protection, our healthcare, our schools, climate change mitigation and development aid, in order to enable Europeans to keep killing and maiming one another and destroying one another's infrastructure. The peace dividend is being dilapidated. Forever? Hopefully not.

For a time will hopefully come in the not too distant future when neither side feels it can make much military gain at an affordable human and material cost. Some deal will then at long last become feasible, presumably with (some) national sovereignty preserved at the cost of (some) territorial integrity. Such a deal would not be fundamentally different from the deal that put an end to the war between Holland and Belgium in 1839: Belgium could retain the national sovereignty it had claimed in 1830 at the cost of losing half of its provinces of Limburg and Luxembourg. By the time the compromise was reached however, that war had only resulted in the deaths of a few hundred soldiers, some of them commemorated on Brussels' Place des Martyrs, not the hundreds of thousands believed to have been killed so far in Ukraine.

If and when it finally comes, the deal that will put an end to the war in Ukraine will not be considered a just peace by either side. But it will stop the slaughter and destruction. One will then be right to regret that the same deal was not made much earlier, thereby sparing countless families on both sides the loss of a son, a father, a

partner, and reducing the colossal costs of reconstruction. One will then have no option but to patiently heal the deep wounds, repair the broken links and laboriously restore a modicum of mutual *bienveillance*. However pointless, it will then be forgivable to deplore that no one, at the right time, had the Monnet–Schuman–Adenauer wisdom and power to bring about a second miracle of European peace.

Implementing the lessons

It would not be pointless, however, to keep implementing the lessons that can be learned from the sharp contrast between the post-1945 and post-1989 responses. This implies both resisting the re-erection of trade and migration barriers within the EU and endeavouring to develop institutions that bring European citizens of all nationalities together, including by exploiting the current geopolitical climate to create a genuine European army. Implementing those lessons also means being open to enlarging the Union, to extending the strong commercial interdependence of the single market to more neighbouring countries, but without weakening the no less important common trust-building institutions.

Finally, implementing those lessons means that one should not call for the end of globalisation and turn ‘de-risking’ and ‘de-coupling’ into categorical imperatives. The development of international trade is not only a source of mutual economic benefit and a key factor in lifting a large part of mankind out of poverty. Believing, as Thomas Paine did, that ‘if commerce were permitted to act to the universal extent it is capable, it would extirpate the system of war’ would be too simplistic.²⁰ But the connection Paine saw, along with Montesquieu and Kant, between universal trade and universal peace remains relevant today, providing that the development of trade prompts the birth of institutions that regulate it, prevents it from causing havoc and tragedies and, in turn, calls for the development of further formal and informal trust-building institutions. This was not obvious, but proved possible at the European level. It is far more difficult at the global level and yet must prove possible—one day.

20 Paine, *The Life and Major Writings of Thomas Paine*, 400.

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About the author

Philippe Van Parijs is Emeritus Professor at the University of Louvain (Hoover Chair of Economic and Social Ethics) and special guest professor at the University of Leuven. He is a member of Belgium's Royal Academy and a Fellow of the British Academy, and chairs the Brussels Council for Multilingualism. His books include *Real Freedom for All* (Oxford University Press 1995), *Linguistic Justice for Europe and for the World* (Oxford University Press 2011) and *Basic Income. A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy* (with Y. Vanderborght, Harvard University Press 2017).

Part III - Preserving European Peace: War, Institutional Adaptation and EU Enlargement



Law, Leadership and Autonomy:

The Foundations and Future
of European Peace

Ana Palacio

The geopolitical moment

We are reflecting on European peace at a particularly revealing moment. War has returned to the European continent with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, reminding Europeans that large-scale interstate conflicts are not relics of the past but a persistent possibility in international politics. The return of high-intensity warfare to the continent has shattered assumptions that took root over the past three decades—namely, that economic integration, institutional cooperation and globalisation had rendered traditional power politics largely obsolete within Europe.

At the same time, the international system as a whole is undergoing a profound transformation. The geopolitical landscape is becoming more competitive, more fragmented and less cooperative. The optimism that followed the end of the Cold War—when many believed that liberal democracy, economic interdependence and multilateral institutions would gradually shape a more peaceful international order—has given way to a more uncertain and contested environment.

Events beyond Europe reinforce this sense of systemic transition. The war now unfolding between the US, Israel and Iran has once again demonstrated how rapidly regional tensions can escalate into broader strategic confrontation. Developments in the Middle East, disruptions to energy flows and the risk of wider instability remind us that Europe's security environment extends far beyond its immediate neighbourhood. In this crisis, the EU has politically aligned itself with the US and Israel while at the same time emphasising the need to preserve international law and prevent wider regional escalation. That dual posture illustrates a central characteristic of the European project: the attempt to reconcile strategic alliances with a normative commitment to the rules-based order.

More broadly, the multilateral system that emerged after the Second World War is under growing strain. The US—the principal architect and guarantor of that system—has become more selective in its support for the institutions and norms it once championed. At various moments, President Trump's administration has openly

questioned the value of multilateral institutions and international agreements that had long been considered pillars of the global order.

China, the principal systemic challenger to Western influence, approaches the system from a different perspective. Beijing does not necessarily seek to dismantle the architecture of multilateralism. Instead, its framework global initiatives (development, security, civilisation and, most recently added, governance) preserve the institutional shell of the existing system while presenting principles and practices that reflect its own political preferences and strategic interests. The result is a growing tension between competing visions of international order.

At the same time, the nature of power itself is evolving. Strategic influence is no longer exercised exclusively by states. The growing role of technological platforms, digital infrastructures and private actors has introduced new dimensions into global power dynamics. The prominence of figures such as Elon Musk—whose companies operate critical satellite networks, communication infrastructures and space launch capabilities—illustrates how private technological power can intersect with geopolitical decision-making in unprecedented ways. In domains ranging from satellite connectivity to artificial intelligence, private actors increasingly possess capabilities that have strategic implications for states and alliances alike.

These developments highlight a broader shift: power in the twenty-first century is becoming more diffuse, more technologically mediated and more complex. Governments must navigate not only relations with other states but also interactions with powerful private actors whose decisions can shape the strategic environment.

For Europe, this changing landscape raises fundamental questions. The European project was conceived in a particular geopolitical context: a world divided by the Cold War, structured by American leadership and characterised by a shared commitment among Western democracies to rebuild a rules-based international order. That context no longer exists.

Yet precisely for that reason, it is worth recalling what the EU represents. Too often

the European project is described primarily as a market or a regulatory system. In reality, it is something far more profound. The EU remains one of the most extraordinary political achievements of the post-war world, a courageous response to the tragedies of the twentieth century. Its purpose was not merely economic integration but the transformation of the political dynamics that had repeatedly driven Europe into catastrophic conflict. It was not simply a market or an institution—but a peace project.

The miracle

Europe after 1945 produced something unprecedented in its own history. A continent that had generated two world wars within a single generation succeeded in building a political framework designed precisely to prevent war between its members. The scale of this achievement can only be fully understood against the backdrop of European history. For centuries, Europe had been the epicentre of international conflict. The system that emerged after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, based on a balance of power, sought to maintain stability by preventing any single power from dominating the continent. Yet, this system often produced instability of its own, as shifting alliances and strategic rivalries repeatedly led to war.

The first half of the twentieth century demonstrated the catastrophic consequences of this dynamic. The First World War devastated the European continent and undermined the political structures that had previously sustained the balance of power. The interwar period witnessed the collapse of fragile attempts to construct a cooperative international order. The rise of totalitarian regimes and aggressive nationalism ultimately culminated in the Second World War, the most destructive conflict in human history.

In the aftermath of this catastrophe, European leaders faced a fundamental question: how could the continent escape the cycle of rivalry and conflict that had characterised its history? The answer was both bold and innovative. Instead of attempting to restore the traditional balance of power, they sought to transform the very foundations of political relations between European states. The intellectual and political roots of this transformation can be traced to two key sequences.

The Atlantic Charter of 1941 articulated the principles of a rules-based international order grounded in cooperation, economic openness and collective security. It reflected the belief that peace could only be sustained through a system of shared norms, giving birth to the paradigm that has supported the global system: the objective is peace; peace is achieved through prosperity; and prosperity is achieved through rules-based interaction. The creation of the UN in 1945 sought to institutionalise these principles at the global level. The UN represented an ambitious attempt to create a framework for managing international conflict through diplomacy and multilateral cooperation.

Within Europe itself, however, the decisive step came with the 9 May 1950 Schuman Declaration. The proposal advanced by Robert Schuman—largely inspired by Jean Monnet—sought to place French and German coal and steel production under a common authority. These industries were not chosen at random: coal and steel formed the industrial backbone of military power. By pooling these resources under supranational control, the plan aimed to make war between France and Germany materially impossible.

The significance of this proposal lay not only in its practical implications, but also in its conceptual innovation. For the first time in modern history, sovereign states voluntarily agreed to share control over strategic sectors of their economies to achieve a broader political objective: peace. European integration thus institutionalised reconciliation. Instead of seeking security through dominance or deterrence alone, European states embedded their relations in a dense network of institutions, rules and shared policies. Sovereignty was not abolished but shared, creating a novel political structure that combined elements of national autonomy with supranational governance.

The novelty of this arrangement lay in the way it redefined the relationship between power and law. Historically, European politics had often been characterised by each nation's pursuit of its own interests through the balance of power. The emerging European order sought to discipline that dynamic through legal norms and institutional procedures. In doing so, Europe developed a distinctive model of political organisation:

a union of states and citizens governed by law and sustained by cooperation.

Why European peace worked

The durability of European peace was not the result of a single factor. Rather, it rested on a complex interaction of geopolitical, institutional and social elements. European peace was geopolitical, institutional and social at the same time.

The first pillar was Franco-German reconciliation. For centuries the rivalry between France and Germany had been the central fault line of European politics. The wars of 1870, 1914 and 1939 demonstrated the destructive potential of this antagonism. The post-war settlement deliberately sought to reverse this dynamic. Through integration and cooperation, former adversaries became partners. The Franco-German relationship evolved into the driving force behind European integration.

The second pillar was the construction of institutions capable of managing conflict peacefully. The European Communities—and later the EU—created structured mechanisms for negotiation, compromise and collective decision-making. Disputes that might previously have escalated into diplomatic crises were instead channelled into institutional procedures.

The rule of law played a central role in this transformation. The European legal order gradually shaped the behaviour of states and citizens alike. Courts, regulations and treaties provided a framework within which political and economic interactions could take place without recourse to coercion.

The third pillar was economic interdependence. The development of the single market transformed the incentives shaping relations among European states. Economic integration created mutual benefits and shared prosperity. As trade and investment flows deepened, the economic costs of conflict became increasingly prohibitive.

The fourth pillar was the American strategic umbrella. The US played a decisive role in stabilising Europe during the Cold War. Through NATO, Washington provided the security guarantees that allowed Western European states to focus on economic

reconstruction and political integration.

European peace was supported by social cohesion. The welfare state and the emergence of broad middle classes across Europe created domestic stability and political moderation. Citizens supported integration because it delivered tangible benefits: economic prosperity, social security and political stability. Together, these elements created a durable political equilibrium that sustained peace across the continent for more than seven decades.

‘Millennials’, ‘Gen Z’ and ‘Gen Alpha’ have grown accustomed to European peace. Their perspective on social cohesion in Europe was built on the peace fought for by their grandparents’ generation, sustained by their parents’ generation and therefore assumed by their generation. Young Europeans, therefore, do not perceive the European project as a result of war, sacrifices and political compromise. They take the EU, its stability and its perks for granted: a Europe of interrail and Erasmus, cross-border connections and cheap travel.

Young Europeans have not lived through a period of major interstate conflicts on European soil, and so they do not discern the connection between European integration and a situation of war. Even since February 2022, Russia’s aggression against Ukraine has not triggered a major response in the EU’s youth: aside from students’ solidarity for future peace and support for the displaced Ukrainian population, there has not been a call-to-arms, a ‘boots on the ground’. To them, this conflict is a distant threat that will never arrive because the Union will keep it at bay. For many—particularly for those from countries further away from the eastern border—increased defence spending is perceived as wasteful, conscription deemed an illusion and wars relegated to a problem of the past or other faraway regions.

Young Europeans are concentrated on building their personal careers in not very promising circumstances. Their prospects for this millennium rely on a peace that was supposedly guaranteed by their grandparents, who fought so that future generations would not have to. But now their prospects have diminished. Young people face a housing crisis, an elevated cost of living, a lack of employment opportunities, an

uncertain geopolitical future, a weakened rule of law and high levels of political polarisation. European integration does not offer them a future. This is not the European peace that they were promised, nor one that will allow them to aspire and flourish.

Why European peace is under strain

The current geopolitical moment reveals the limits of the model that sustained European peace for decades. The architecture built after 1945 proved remarkably resilient, but it was never designed for a world in which several of its underlying assumptions would simultaneously erode.

The first of these assumptions concerned the broader international environment in which European integration unfolded. For much of the post-war period, the European project developed within a relatively stable geopolitical framework structured by American leadership and the Cold War balance of power. Even after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the international system retained a degree of strategic predictability. The US remained the central guarantor of security in Europe, while Russia appeared temporarily weakened and largely disengaged from direct geopolitical competition with the West.

Today, that environment has changed profoundly. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that the return of interstate war to Europe was not merely a theoretical possibility. Russia's invasion represents not only a violation of Ukrainian sovereignty but also a challenge to the broader principles of territorial integrity and international law that underpin the European security order. In doing so, it reminds Europeans that geography and power never entirely disappeared from the political landscape.

This is the first structural limit confronting European peace: geopolitics never completely disappeared. For a time, Europeans allowed themselves to believe that economic integration and political cooperation had fundamentally transformed the nature of international relations. The expectation that commerce and interdependence would gradually soften geopolitical rivalry was not entirely unfounded—it reflected the experience of Western Europe after 1945. Yet that experience was historically

exceptional rather than universally replicable.

The second limit concerns the strategic foundation of European security: the transatlantic relationship. For more than seven decades, American military power provided the external guarantee that allowed European integration to flourish.

However, the transatlantic relationship is evolving. This evolution does not necessarily imply a rupture, but it does involve a gradual redefinition of responsibilities. The US increasingly views the Indo-Pacific as the central theatre of strategic competition. China's rise has become the primary focus of foreign and defence policy in America. In that context, Washington expects Europeans to assume a greater share of the burden for their own defence.

This shift reflects structural realities rather than political preference alone. The US cannot indefinitely serve as the sole guarantor of European security while simultaneously managing strategic competition in Asia and addressing domestic priorities. Europeans must therefore confront a challenge that has long been postponed: how to strengthen the EU's own defence capabilities while maintaining the transatlantic alliance as the cornerstone of its security.

A third source of strain lies within the EU itself. The political consensus that supported European integration for decades has become more fragile. The traditional political cultures that shaped the European project—Christian democracy, social democracy and liberalism—have lost their dominance in national political systems. Party systems have become more fragmented, and ideological polarisation has increased in several member states.

In parallel, nationalist narratives questioning the legitimacy or effectiveness of European institutions have gained traction. These movements often present European integration as a constraint on national sovereignty rather than as a framework that enhances collective stability and prosperity.

European integration historically advanced through cooperation among mainstream political forces that shared a broadly similar vision of democracy, social compromise

and international cooperation. As political landscapes become more polarised, building the consensus required for further integration becomes more difficult.

The fourth structural tension concerns the relationship between security and social cohesion. The European peace that emerged after the Second World War rested not only on geopolitical stability and institutional cooperation but also on the development of a distinctive social model. Welfare states, relatively high levels of social protection and strong public services created the domestic stability that underpinned political moderation and support for European integration.

Today, however, the deteriorating security environment requires increased defence spending across Europe. Governments are confronted with the need to modernise armed forces, invest in new technologies and strengthen military readiness. These investments are necessary, but they also raise difficult questions about political priorities and budgetary trade-offs.

The challenge is not merely financial; it is political. European citizens may accept the necessity of strengthening defence in the face of new geopolitical risks, but such policies will only remain sustainable if they do not fundamentally undermine the social achievements that form the foundation of the EU's political stability. At the same time, the debate on defence spending often obscures a deeper structural problem: Europe's military capacity remains fragmented, redundant in some areas and critically insufficient in others.

The persistence of multiple national procurement systems, overlapping capabilities and uncoordinated planning continues to generate inefficiencies that weaken the continent's overall strategic posture. Even more importantly, significant gaps remain in key enabling capabilities—from intelligence and strategic lift to logistics and command-and-control—areas in which European forces still rely heavily on the US. Strengthening European defence, therefore, requires not only greater investment, but also a far deeper level of coordination, integration and strategic prioritisation among member states.

In this sense, the dilemma facing Europe today is not simply between peace and war, but between different dimensions of peace. The geopolitical peace that requires credible defence capabilities must remain compatible with the social peace that sustains democratic legitimacy.

Another dimension of this transformation concerns enlargement. Historically, the EU expanded its stabilising influence by integrating new democracies into its institutional framework. Enlargement played a decisive role in consolidating democracy across Southern Europe in 1986 and across Central and Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War. By anchoring these countries within a system governed by law and institutional cooperation, the Union extended the zone of stability across a continent long marked by geopolitical rivalry.

The war in Ukraine has once again placed enlargement at the centre of Europe's strategic debate. Ukraine's European trajectory is no longer perceived solely as a long-term institutional process but also as a geopolitical necessity. At the same time, the scale and circumstances of Ukraine's candidacy raise complex questions about how the Union itself must evolve to accommodate such a member.

In this context a new dynamic has begun to emerge in the debate on enlargement. Traditionally, accession to the EU requires candidate countries to complete a long process of negotiation and alignment across the thirty-five chapters of the *acquis* before membership can be granted. The geopolitical realities created by the war in Ukraine, however, have reopened the discussion about whether this sequence might need to evolve: what has been described as a form of 'reversed enlargement' would imply that political decisions regarding membership could precede the full closure of all negotiating chapters, with regulatory alignment continuing progressively after accession.

At the same time, functional integration can advance in specific areas even before membership is achieved. Ukraine already participates in several concrete initiatives—including the extension of EU roaming arrangements—that illustrate how elements of the internal market can be gradually extended to candidates. Yet precisely because

such approaches modify the traditional balance between conditionality and political decision, they are already provoking hesitation among member states concerned about preserving the credibility and coherence of the enlargement process.

Finally, the changing nature of power itself introduces additional complexity. As technological transformation reshapes global politics, new actors are emerging alongside states as influential players in strategic domains. The growing role of private technological companies—operating satellites, digital infrastructures and artificial intelligence platforms—illustrates how economic and technological capabilities increasingly intersect with geopolitical influence. Figures such as Elon Musk have demonstrated how private actors can unexpectedly become part of geopolitical calculations. This phenomenon reflects a broader transformation: power in the twenty-first century is becoming more diffuse, less hierarchical and more technologically mediated.

For Europe, this evolution presents both opportunities and vulnerabilities. On the one hand, the continent possesses considerable technological and economic capacity. On the other hand, Europe must ensure that it does not become strategically dependent on infrastructure controlled by actors beyond its regulatory or political reach.

The geopolitical environment is becoming more competitive, the transatlantic relationship is evolving, internal political consensus is more fragile, and technological transformation is reshaping the nature of power itself. Yet, recognising these pressures does not imply that the European project has failed. On the contrary, it highlights the need to adapt its principles and institutions to a new strategic context.

What Europe must do now

If the conditions that sustained European peace are changing, the response cannot consist simply in preserving existing arrangements unchanged. The European project must evolve if it is to remain effective in a world characterised by renewed strategic competition.

Yet adaptation does not mean abandoning the fundamental principles that defined the European project from the beginning. The EU should not attempt to become something it is not: it was never conceived as a traditional great power defined primarily by military strength or geopolitical domination.

Its distinctive contribution to international politics lies elsewhere. It lies in the demonstration that cooperation, law and institutional governance can provide a strong (complementary) framework for managing relations among states. In a world returning to power politics, Europe's task is therefore not to imitate great powers but to demonstrate that power and law can coexist.

The first priority must be the defence of the rule of law within Europe itself. The credibility of the European project depends fundamentally on the integrity of its legal and democratic foundations. Respect for democratic norms, judicial independence and fundamental rights is not merely a moral aspiration—it is also a strategic asset. The EU derives much of its global influence from the legitimacy of its political model.

A Union that fails to uphold these principles internally cannot credibly promote them internationally. Conversely, a Europe that remains faithful to its legal and democratic commitments strengthens its ability to shape global debates about governance, rights and international order.

The second priority concerns the Union's role in defending international law. Rules and institutions remain essential for managing interdependence and preventing conflict. Yet, the EU must avoid the illusion that it can by itself preserve the multilateral order created after 1945. That order was built under very specific historical conditions, above all with the leadership of the US. Without that anchor, the system will inevitably evolve in a different direction, increasingly shaped by other powers, most notably China.

The task for Europe, therefore, is not to attempt the restoration of a past configuration that no longer exists, but to contribute as consistently as possible to the adaptation of international rules and institutions to new geopolitical realities, working in close partnership with those actors that still see value in a rules-based framework. Europe

may not be able to shape the entire global order, but it can remain one of the pillars that prevent that order from collapsing.

This commitment should not be mistaken for naïve idealism. International law and multilateral institutions are not alternatives to power; they are instruments through which power can be channelled and disciplined. For middle powers and regional organisations alike, a functioning rules-based framework remains an essential safeguard against the arbitrary exercise of force.

Third, Europeans must assume greater responsibility for their own security. Strategic autonomy should not be understood as a rejection of the transatlantic alliance. On the contrary, a stronger European capacity for defence would reinforce NATO by making the alliance more balanced and sustainable.

The objective is therefore not strategic separation but strategic maturity. Europe must develop the capabilities necessary to defend its interests, contribute to collective security and act when circumstances require it.

Achieving this objective will require political leadership as well as institutional reform. European defence cooperation must move beyond fragmented national initiatives toward greater coordination of procurement, industrial policy and military planning. The EU already possesses instruments capable of supporting this process, but their potential remains only partially realised.

A fourth priority concerns technological sovereignty. As technological innovation increasingly shapes the strategic landscape, Europe must ensure that it remains capable of developing and controlling key infrastructure in areas such as digital networks, artificial intelligence, space and advanced manufacturing.

This does not imply technological isolationism. Europe's prosperity has always depended on openness and international exchange. But openness must be balanced with resilience. Strategic dependencies in critical technologies can translate into geopolitical vulnerabilities.

Finally, Europe must preserve the social foundations that historically underpinned its political stability. European peace was sustained not only by institutions and alliances but also by a social contract that combined economic development with social protection.

The importance of this social dimension cannot be overstated. The legitimacy of the European project has always depended on a political equilibrium that combines economic openness with social protection. European integration advanced during decades in which citizens experienced tangible improvements in living standards, social mobility and public services. The perception that the political system delivered both prosperity and security played a decisive role in sustaining public support for European cooperation.

In the current geopolitical environment, maintaining this balance will become even more important. Investments in defence capabilities, technological transformation and energy transition are indispensable for Europe's strategic future. Yet these policies will only remain politically sustainable if they are accompanied by efforts to preserve essential social cohesion and economic opportunity. Strategic responsibility and social stability must therefore advance together.

In this sense, the challenge facing Europe today is not merely strategic but civilisational. The European project has always sought to reconcile several potentially competing objectives: peace and security, prosperity and solidarity, sovereignty and cooperation.

The current geopolitical environment makes these balances more difficult to sustain, but it also makes them more necessary. The miracle of European peace was not inevitable. It was a political construction in a different world. And like all political constructions, it must now be defended and renewed under new geopolitical conditions. If Europe succeeds in adapting its institutions, strengthening its strategic capacity and preserving its commitment to law and cooperation, the most remarkable political achievement of the post-war era may yet continue to shape the future of the international order.

Author's note on references

This chapter is written from the perspective of a practitioner rather than as a conventional academic contribution. It reflects many years of engagement with European integration, transatlantic relations and the international order through public service, policy work, teaching and writing. While I currently teach at Georgetown University and regularly lecture on these issues, this text was not conceived as a research paper and therefore does not follow an academic format based on footnotes.

The arguments developed here draw on a long process of reflection shaped by professional experience as well as by a broad intellectual engagement with the history of European integration, geopolitics and the evolution of the international order. Rather than being based on specific citations, the chapter reflects this accumulated exposure to policy debates and to the literature that has accompanied them.

At the request of the editors and to provide readers with complementary intellectual context, I include below a short list of works that have been particularly influential in shaping the broader framework within which these reflections are situated. These references should therefore be understood not as sources for specific arguments but as intellectual companions to the themes discussed in this chapter.

Among these influences, the work of Henry Kissinger has been particularly important in my understanding of the relationship between order, legitimacy and power, as well as of the historical foundations of the European state system. His reflections on the impact of technological transformation on the international order—including ideas I had the privilege to discuss with him at length—also provide a useful bridge between classical diplomacy and the emerging challenges posed by artificial intelligence and technological disruption. His argument that previous industrial revolutions were preceded by philosophical worldviews, whereas today technological transformation is advancing without an equivalent conceptual framework, is particularly relevant to the questions raised in this chapter.

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About the author

Ana Palacio is a former Foreign Minister of Spain and a professor at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service. She previously served as Senior Vice President and General Counsel of the World Bank Group. She is a regular speaker at international conferences and a contributor to various publications, including a monthly column for Project Syndicate and a weekly column for El Mundo (Spain).



The European Parliament and Peace

Klaus Welle

War and institutional order

Peace is more than the absence of war. But first, it is the absence of war.

When a war has been horrific and all-encompassing, it can contribute to a long period of peace, establishing a new order. The 30 years of devastating war fought on German territory by European powers during the seventeenth century led to an understanding set out in the Christian confessions to limit conflict: *Cuius regio, eius religio*.¹

Napoleon's wars, stretching from Spain to Russia and Hamburg to Egypt, finally had the same result: the restoration of order based on the agreements achieved during the Congress of Vienna. For about a hundred years, until the First World War, military conflicts remained limited.

The Second World War was no exception either: what has been called the Cold War was many things, including a dictatorship and loss of freedom in the eastern part of the continent, but it was not a war. If wars were fought, they were fought outside the continent of Europe.

The continued pressure of the Soviet Union on the western part of the continent facilitated the creation of what is now the EU: stand together or fall apart'. Centuries-old conflicts became much less relevant and could be overcome.

At the same time, former colonial powers and empires, which account for most of the European countries in the western half of the continent, found a new framework for economic prosperity. That situation allowed for the building of stable institutions that could survive the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, outlasting the historical preconditions of their coming into existence.

The EU provided the home in which the countries of Central and Eastern Europe,

1 *Cuius regio, eius religio* means, literally, 'whose realm, his religion', referring to the principle that the religion of a state was to be that of the ruler.

having regained their freedom, could simultaneously be sovereign nation-states and equal partners and benefit from the political and economic opportunities of the continental space. The introduction of the euro and a process of nearly constant constitutional reform during the period from the Maastricht Treaty to the Lisbon Treaty established a federal union of citizens and states stretching from the Atlantic to the Black Sea and from Lapland to the Mediterranean.

How did the EU deepen and widen so successfully?

Every successful political system has to fully understand the preconditions for its own existence. A European union of citizens and states, therefore, has to properly reflect the necessities of a continent deeply divided by history, religious confessions and culture. It has to establish a government that is divided both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, this division is between the Commission, the Council and the Parliament; vertically, it is between the EU institutions, the member states and the regions and cities. This is a federal union.

Decision-making is slower because everybody is entitled to be heard; but once a decision is taken, it is much more likely to be broadly accepted and to last. In an EU based on free adherence and the theoretical and practical possibility of leaving, as proven by Brexit, that permanent effort to listen and include all voices is the condition that provides the stability of the system itself. The overall stability of the system is not determined by average sentiment, but by the weakest link.

Conflicts will always be there. The EU is a model for alternative conflict resolution through peaceful means. Its approach is based on negotiation, compromise, the rule of law and the acceptance of the legitimate interests of others. Cooperation can help grow the bounty for everybody, as the internal market has proven. Relations between states and people are not just a zero-sum game in which somebody must lose in order for someone else to win. Speed is traded for political cohesion.

Access to markets, capital, major rivers or the sea, the denial of which was hitherto considered a valid reason for waging war, is now provided freely to all members on a reciprocal basis. There is no reason why Germany and France should still tussle over the Rhine as they did for centuries. Mechanisms of financial compensation make the opening of markets politically acceptable and economically viable for the originally less competitive member states.

The EU has thus established a model of alternative and peaceful geopolitics. The space has been transformed by mutual agreement and on the basis of law and voluntary adhesion. The transformation of the Union from 6 to 27 states and the consecutive inclusion of Southern, Northern and then Eastern Europe represents the most successful geopolitical transformation globally of the last 50 years.

A culture of cooperation

Within the EU system, the Parliament occupies a special space. It is the only directly elected transnational assembly worldwide, and it wields major legislative, budgetary, ratification and nomination power.

It is essential that the European Parliament not be organised according to nationality, but by political proximity and affiliation in transnational political groups that jointly decide on key votes. In fact, nationality is statistically not significant for voting behaviour, whereas political group membership is to a very high degree, often above 90%. As a Member of the European Parliament (MEP), one's ability to cooperate and negotiate with members of different nationalities is crucial.

When wanting to overcome the national resentment, prejudice and aggression that were so often used in the past to turn the people of Europe against each other, nothing is as effective as cooperating with each other on a daily basis in the same political family organised as a European political group, political party or political foundation. To further cement transnational relationships, decisive negotiations on legislative files are entrusted to a group of rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs, appointed by the transnational political groups rather than national representatives.

Unlike its national counterparts, the European Parliament is not organised with a fixed governing majority and an opposing minority. Anybody from any group can make the decisive difference between a vote being won or lost and the fate of a legislative project or political resolution. That is why a successful lawmaker needs to cooperate across the political divide and regardless of nationality. Success demands a culture of cooperation, not confrontation. Accordingly, members are seated in the hemicycle facing towards the president, not antagonistically towards each other, as in the British House of Commons.

This provides a strong incentive for representatives of more radical political forces to moderate their demands, allowing them to wield power while at the same time stabilising the political system at the EU level. This is an essential lesson for the many who later return to national leadership positions.

The composition of the Parliament is based on the principle of degressive proportionality, a recognition by the more populous member states that in a federal system of citizens and states, two essential principles need to be reconciled: the sovereignty of the state and the equality of the citizens. Size, contrary to the experience of early twentieth-century national power politics, is not the only thing that matters.

Fighting for peace and understanding

One of the most underestimated tools of the European Parliament is the urgency resolutions procedure. There is no military conflict, no human rights violation, no infringement of democracy that will not be pointed out in this monthly plenary procedure. These procedures are very unpopular with governments, sometimes including those of EU member states, but offer a glimmer of hope for all those thrown into jail by authoritarian rulers. And they are celebrated by those democratic leaders who have managed to overturn dictatorships.

The outcomes of this procedure are shared all over the world by interparliamentary delegations. Most MEPs actively engage with the resolutions and the political positions they convey.

MEPs are not only knowledgeable about legislative affairs, but also engage in international matters, often publicly contributing to peace. Many actively participate in election observations, if democracy is at risk or, on the contrary, receives a second chance after a bitter struggle or civil war.

The European Parliament Sakharov Prize for human rights activists has become a major honour, often preceding the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the same person or group. A speech to the plenary of the European Parliament gives the winners—or their representatives, if the winners are in prison or unable to leave their own country—a major opportunity to draw massive public attention to their cause. All winners are honoured by their names being engraved on the Sakharov Walk of Freedom.

The Jean Monnet dialogues offer a more private setting, where discreet dialogue opportunities are created away from public attention. Over many years, the various Ukrainian political factions have made use of this instrument. The historical House of Jean Monnet, property of the European Parliament and enlarged as an intimate conference centre, serves as the meeting place.

The European Parliament is aware that European identity and historical remembrance are critical to maintaining a European order of peace. On the initiative of its then president, Hans-Gert Pöttering, and under the guidance of renowned international historical experts, a House of European History was established in Brussels, a place that now offers the opportunity for dialogue for hundreds of thousands of European citizens every year.

The EU has helped to preserve peace within its borders and beyond, but nothing can be taken for granted. The spirit of nationalism and authoritarianism is still alive and regaining strength. And as François Mitterrand said when addressing the plenary of the European Parliament, ‘Nationalism is war.’²

2 F. Mitterrand, ‘François Mitterrand Speech on Nationalism’, Speech addressing the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 17 January 1995 [YouTube video], European Parliament, 2022.

The new challenge: a very hostile environment

Since its aggression against Georgia in 2008, Russia has been gradually returning to its 500-year-old imperial project of enlarging its borders through military power whenever the opportunity arises. By colonising its neighbours, it has successfully transformed the city-state of Moscow, tributary to the Mongols, into the state with the largest landmass on earth.

The military collapse of Ukraine would re-establish Russia's empire. The war's aims, though, are not limited to Ukraine and certainly not to just some of its eastern territories. This was made abundantly clear in 2022 with the demands transmitted to NATO and the West: submission of Central and Eastern Europe to the sphere of Russian influence and the reversal of the order established in Europe after 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet Union—which is regarded by Putin as the greatest misfortune in history. War as a means of political domination is back on our continent.

At the same time, the Trump administration is re-evaluating its relationship with Europe.

The defence of the continent is now regarded as primarily the responsibility of the Europeans themselves, with the US coming in with a secondary and supporting role only, contrary to the policy implemented over the last 80 years. The US has largely withdrawn its financial support for Ukraine, which equalled the efforts of Europeans during President Biden's term.

The EU is regarded by the US as an inconvenience, if not a hostile actor, limiting free speech and the actions of major US digital companies. Parties of the authoritarian nationalist right that would like to weaken the EU or leave or destroy it, such as the German Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland) or the Hungarian Civic Alliance (Fidesz), are openly supported by the US administration during election campaigns.

The European security architecture is now adapting to these new conditions in a

race against time. This new security architecture will be based on five pillars:

1. A sovereign Ukraine. If Ukraine can continue to defend itself, Europe will be safe.
2. A substantially increased military contribution from the member states, as established by NATO.
3. A Europeanised NATO.
4. A reduced, but still sizeable contribution from the US.
5. An EU that has deepened its Defence Union and finally established a European defence.

External pressure can break you, but it also makes diamonds.

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About the author

Klaus Welle has chaired the Martens Centre's Academic Council since April 2023. In May 2025 he was appointed Special Advisor to the Commissioner for Defence and Space. He is also a Visiting Professor in Practice at the London School of Economics, a Visiting Professor at KU Leuven and a Leader in Residence at the Moynihan Center of the Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership in New York. From 2009 to 2022 he served as Secretary General of the European Parliament.



The EU's Peace Identity Inside Out:

Internal Settlement, External Mediation
and Geopolitical Pressure

Antje Herrberg

I came of age intellectually in a Europe still negotiating its eastern horizon. Writing in the 1990s on European foreign policy, the central question was never simply what was the EU doing externally, but what kind of political entity did it believe itself to be in relation to the East. For many shaped by the Cold War and its aftermath, the EU was first and foremost a peace project—and this was not an abstract slogan, but a lived transformation of the political order in post-war and post-reunification Europe.

However, what does this term *peace identity* or similar mean in analytical terms? Is it a normative claim, a retrospective (and perhaps now unfashionable) political narrative or the product of a historically specific transformation of the political order?

To answer the question of whether the EU possesses a peace identity that it can project externally moves us beyond institutional description. In many ways, the EU's self-understanding as a peace project reshaped how the political order was imagined and practised. Over decades, Europe developed what might be described as a machinery of compromise and negotiation: dense legal frameworks, procedural negotiation cultures and multilevel governance structures that rendered the management of difference routine. Working out compromise—that is, maintaining peace—became less an episodic outcome than a political habit and, as such, part of the DNA of the EU.

Throughout this chapter, the term EU peace identity refers to a peace-centred foreign policy and security policy identity. It captures a historically specific transformation in which sovereignty is pooled, antagonistic projects are embedded in its dense institutional framework and recourse to war among member states becomes structurally irrational. This identity, which is relationally constituted, is also externalised through its external relations, where dialogue, mediation, and institutionalised and multilateral compromise prevail over coercive crisis management.

To ask whether the EU actually self-identifies as a peace promoter in a way that enables it to project peace externally moves us beyond institutional description. In many ways, the EU's self-understanding as a peace project has reshaped how the political order is imagined and practised. Over the decades, Europe has developed what might be described as a machinery of compromise and negotiation: dense legal

frameworks, procedural negotiation cultures and multilevel governance structures that have rendered the management of difference routine. Working out constant compromises—peace—has become less an episodic outcome than a political habit and, as such, is part of the DNA of the EU. The Nobel Committee recognised this: ‘The EU and its forerunners have for over six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe’.¹

I am writing in 2026, and the return of war to Europe and the broader reconfiguration of global politics now place this peace identity under pressure. The challenge today is no longer simply one of how to project that peace model outwards, but really of how this identity can be sustained under conditions of geopolitical rivalry and renewed emphasis on deterrence.

In this logic, this chapter proceeds in four steps. It first reconstructs the EU’s peace identity as an internal and relational achievement, rooted in the transformation of sovereignty and in the successive institutionalisation of compromise within Europe itself. It then examines how this internal settlement travels outwards, not as the exportation of an ideological or idealist peace model, but as a repertoire of practices expressed most clearly in the Union’s engagement with peace mediation. The third section turns to the Balkans, Northern Ireland and Cyprus as the three litmus tests of this inside–out logic, with each revealing something different in terms of the reach and limits of the ‘European’ approach. The final section reflects on how the current geopolitical environment, marked by war in Europe and expressed through the efforts of deterrence and the language of *Zeitenwende*, is reshaping the conditions under which this European self-identification can be maintained.

1 Norwegian Nobel Committee, ‘The Nobel Peace Prize for 2012’, Press Release, 12 December 2012.

In what way does the EU self-identify as a peace project?

I would argue that the EU's peace identity is never singular. In early research, I framed the question as 'which identity for which Europe?', recognising that the EU has always contained several competing self-understandings. Civilian power, normative power, strategic actor—these are not and never have been simply analytical categories but rather are expressions of internal contestation. Europe's peace identity has emerged through deep negotiations about the idea of Europe itself. Thus, what has been inherited today rests on that prolonged construction, but how this heritage continues under the structural pressure it is now experiencing is the question we need to confront if the aspiration is to salvage a coherent and strong EU.

We need to understand that the shaping of political identity—whether of nation-states or of the EU—is not an autonomous exercise that comes solely from within. It is inherently relational, formed through processes of differentiation and interaction, in particular in Europe's case with its East or the former Soviet Union.²

What is at stake in this relational construction of identity is not simply foreign policy positioning but the entire political ontology, that is, how the political order in itself is understood, organised and made legitimate. The EU's peace identity emerged from a historically specific transformation of sovereignty, in which antagonistic national projects were gradually restructured into a system of institutional interdependence. As such, peace was not declared, but engineered through proceduralisation, legalisation and the routinisation of disagreement—a process termed *engrenage* by the school of neo-functional political scientists.

In this sense, the European peace identity is not only an ideological commitment but a structural practice. Identity formation of this kind is inherently relational. Political communities construct their self-understandings through a process of recognition

2 A. Herrberg, 'Russia and the European Other: Searching for a Post-Soviet Identity', in C. Rhodes (ed.), *The European Union in the World Community* (Lynne Rienner, 1998).

and differentiation. During the Cold War, Western Europe could imagine itself as a post-sovereign space precisely because the confrontation with sovereignty was externalised and stabilised. Peace within was made plausible by structured confrontation without; in other words, the 'other' was not eliminated, but was contained within a recognisable order. The Helsinki process symbolised this paradox: confrontation and dialogue could coexist.

Hence, a cold peace did not emerge in Europe not because of the absence of conflict but as a result of its containment and management at the systemic level.

After 1989, this relational configuration shifted. The collapse of the Soviet Union created the possibility that Europe's internal peace settlement could expand eastward. Timothy Garton Ash's reflections on a 'Europe whole and free' captured the confidence of that moment—a growing belief that the institutionalised reconciliation in the West could extend across the continent. Enlargement appeared to be the widening of a peaceful order grounded in law and negotiated restraint.

Not only was the political and institutional model extended, but so too was the assumption that the negotiated order would be reciprocated as a shared horizon. Here the inside–outside linkage became decisive: the peace identity, forged internally through years of institutionalised compromise, was projected outward under the assumption that the negotiated order could expand. Dialogue—both formal and informal—was constitutive to this projection. The Union consistently asserted its preference for negotiated settlement in Northern Ireland, the Balkans, its near neighbourhood and Cyprus, and also later in its peace mediation engagements abroad.

Hence, the projection of this peace ideal was not neutral but reflected a specific experience of how political order could be stabilised through process, institutionalisation and the embedding of negotiated compromise.

In retrospect, this projection of EU peace thus rests on the critical premise that others would also enter into the process of *engrenage* and engage in negotiating order in comparable ways. Where this was *not* the case, tensions emerged. The

durability of the European peace identity abroad is therefore closely interlinked with its internal coherence. The internal and the external are deeply intertwined. The EU's capacity to act as a peace mediator externally is inseparable from how convincingly it practises its self-identification as a peace project internally.

The elephant in the room: Russia as the European 'other'

As noted above, this European peace identity was not shaped in isolation. It was also shaped in relation to a constitutive 'other', through which the EU defined both its boundaries and its political self-understanding. During the Cold War, Western Europe's integration unfolded in contrast to the Soviet order, which was structured around different conceptions of sovereignty and authority. In this configuration, an 'other' was identified and, through confrontation, however adversarial, embedded within a shared, if limited framework of predictability.

The growing scope of institutionalised reconciliation, progressively integrating more countries into the shared political and legal framework, was viewed by Moscow as its own geopolitical contraction and loss of status.

In my earlier work on Russia and the European 'other', I argued that in the mid-1990s Russia's post-Soviet identity oscillated between seeking recognition as part of Europe and asserting its civilisational distinctiveness. Europe projected an inclusive order; Russian political discourse increasingly articulated sovereign reassertion and multipolar autonomy. The divergence was rooted in matters of recognition, status and the nature of political order as political communities sought recognition of their status and dignity. Whereas Europe perceived enlargement as voluntary accession to a peace settlement, Russian political discourse increasingly framed it as its own marginalisation within that order. What emerged was not necessarily a divergence of (initial) political interests but a growing and sometimes silent disagreement about the legitimate post-Cold War order.

The events in Ukraine of 2014 and then, decisively, 2022 represent the breakdown of a framework that was never agreed upon in the first place. The assumption that all actors within the European space were ultimately operating on a plane of negotiated or tacit restraint proved untenable. For the EU, this rupture was (perhaps unknowingly) existential, not because it exposed its military vulnerability but because it destabilised the narrative of irreversible peace that underpinned its identity as a peace actor. The 'other' was thus not simply adversarial, but not operating on the same plane of negotiated order. All this fundamentally unsettled the EU's peace identity, forcing a reconsideration of how that identity could be maintained under conditions of open rivalry and contested order.

If war among European states re-enters political reality, the Union's peace identity cannot be asserted as self-evident. It requires regrounding. This rupture therefore requires a rearticulation: peace is no longer the taken-for-granted condition of the European space, but a project that must be consciously sustained even under adversarial conditions.

The crux of the question is, therefore, can and should the EU maintain its identity as a peace project in a context where deterrence, conflict and geopolitical rivalry have re-emerged as structuring conditions?

The EU has three possible pathways at its disposal:

1. *mimetic adaptation*: adapting itself to the language of power politics, albeit that this risks dissolving that which made it distinct;
2. *defensive retreat*: by doubling down on the internal model and retreating into a protected normative space, preserving its identity at the cost of relevance; or
3. *reflexive articulation*: defining itself through the conditions it creates and sustains, regardless of whether others reciprocate.

The externalisation of peace: mediation

If the EU's peace identity was forged through institutionalised compromise, it is unsurprising that dialogue or peace mediation eventually emerged as its preferred external or foreign policy instrument after the setting up of the European External Action Service. Yet peace mediation as such was not truly an endogenous extension of political practice. It was, to some extent, pushed onto the EU by outside actors, initially advocated by non-governmental organisations such as the Crisis Management Initiative, and countries including Sweden, Finland and Germany. The topic became relevant in 2009 with the publication of the first Concept on Strengthening EU Peace Mediation and Dialogue Capacities, and the setting up of the European External Action Service. Positioning peace mediation and human security issues as a responsibility of the high representative consolidated a civilian and normative profile that had long characterised the EU's external action. What had long been present as a dispersed practice across the EU's instruments of engagement, became, over time, much more consciously articulated. The Peace Mediation Concepts rendered visible and more deliberate a mode of engagement that had been embedded in the EU's external action but was increasingly becoming part of a new foreign policy doctrine.

However, there was also structural asymmetry embedded in this new articulation. The EU is the product of a deep transformation of the political order, wherein sovereignty was partially pooled, historical antagonisms were embedded within institutions and the recourse to violence among members became structurally irrational. What has been externalised is less a model of peace than a repertoire of practices, formats of dialogue, and institutional scaffolding in the form of political dialogues or agreements through which political contestation can be structured.

The European practice of peace mediation as it is delivered through its mediation support often excels less in high-visibility deal-making than in the architecture surrounding negotiation: sequencing, confidence building, technical arrangements, institutional guarantees, flanking measures, and the mobilisation of economic and political incentives. Yet where conflicts are rooted in existential questions of sovereignty and recognition, for

instance in parts of Eastern Europe, process design alone cannot replicate the historical conditions under which Europe's own peace settlement emerged. The distinction, however, is not absolute. Europeanisation is actively pursued as a form of differentiation from an alternative order. What differs are the conditions: the process unfolds not within a stabilised environment but in an actively contested geopolitical space.

In practice, European peace mediation or mediation support has rarely relied on charismatic deal-making or headline diplomacy. It is its comparative advantages of consistency, sustained engagement, technical accompaniment, provision of guarantees, linking of political agreements to institutional frameworks and mobilisation of financial instruments that render compromise materially viable. These have created a deeply enmeshed peacemaking sector, comprised of a dense network of non-governmental organisations and practitioners that sustains dialogue and mediation on the ground, often going beyond elite-level negotiations. This quieter, more bureaucratic form of peace mediation often lacks visibility, yet it precisely reflects the internal political culture from which the Union emerged — and its peace identity.

As a result, the EU's mediation profile has often been cautious, and despite its considerable resources and expertise, it has been hesitant to assume a leading role. My observation that the EU 'punches below its weight' as a peace mediator does not refer to a failure of capacity, but to limited political assertiveness. What is at stake is the ability to act with pronounced, shared, visible and sustained political intent. Identifying as a peace actor requires not only competence but the willingness to fully inhabit this role.

This tension between capacity and political assertiveness has long been recognised within the Union's own policy frameworks. These articulate the EU's approach to mediation as an extension of its broader political practice and have served as a reference point for both member states and other multilateral actors. As I and Guy Banim have argued elsewhere,³ this approach reflects a comparative strength not in visible deal-making, but in shaping the conditions under which negotiation becomes possible.

3 G. Banim and A. Herrberg, *The European Union as a Peace Mediation Actor: Institutional Developments and Challenges*, CEPOB Policy Brief (2024).

Three litmus tests: the Balkans, Northern Ireland and Cyprus

The 2020 Concept on EU Peace Mediation also aligns closely with the mediation work that has happened in the Balkans and Northern Ireland, albeit unexpectedly, as the Concept has never consciously been applied to these cases. Taken together, the Balkans, Northern Ireland and Cyprus cases illustrate how the EU's self-identification as a peace promoter has been applied in different political contexts. The cases share an inside out dynamic, wherein the EU is part of the political horizon of membership, affecting the EU's capacity to stabilise conflict through dialogue, long-term engagement and institutionalised forms of political mediation.

These cases reveal both the strengths and the limitations of the EU's approach. The tools used have largely been applied using what has been described as the EU's civilian or soft power register — an approach grounded in institutionalisation, incentives and process, rather than coercion. This raises a more fundamental question about the conditions under which the EU's peace identity can operate. The model in the Balkans and Northern Ireland presupposed a relatively clear separation between mediation and coercion. The key question is whether this inside-out, mediation-centred model remains viable when deterrence and security considerations are structurally intertwined with peace engagement.

In the *Western Balkans*, the EU's role as a peace promoter unfolded within a permissive security environment shaped by decisive external intervention, most notably by the US and NATO. This context enabled the EU to deploy its distinctive approach that links political dialogue with long-term transformation through the accession process. Rather than focusing on singular mediation outcomes, the EU structured a broader trajectory in which the transformation of the conflict became embedded in the process of Europeanisation. Its engagement combined facilitation, accession conditionality and crisis-management instruments, creating frameworks in which political contestation could be channelled through institutional incentives, as exemplified by the Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue.

This approach has contributed to stabilisation and incremental transformation, supported by the powerful incentive of EU membership. At the same time, however, it reveals structural limits. Where member state unity is lacking and geopolitical contestation persists, core disputes remain unresolved. The result is a form of stabilisation that is institutionally anchored but politically fragile. The Balkans case thus demonstrates that the EU's inside-out peace identity is most effective when embedded within a broader security architecture and a credible political horizon of integration.

Northern Ireland represents a different configuration, in which the EU was not a primary mediator. The Good Friday Agreement was negotiated by the parties themselves, with strong involvement from the UK, the Republic of Ireland and the US, within a broader European framework of shared membership and open borders. The EU's contribution was indirect but structurally significant. Through cross-border programmes, particularly the PEACE funding initiatives, it created an enabling environment in which cooperation became routinised.

In this context, mediation was not a discrete intervention but was embedded in an institutional ecology of everyday interaction. The EU supported the normalisation of relations by structuring low-threshold cooperation across communities and reinforcing interdependence beyond elite agreements. This contributed to a more deeply internalised form of peace, sustained not only by formal arrangements but by the gradual embedding of cooperative practices.

At the same time, the case highlights a central paradox of the EU's peace role: it is often more effective where it is least visible. The Union contributes to background structuring rather than high-profile diplomacy, reinforcing the perception that the EU punches below its weight despite its substantial long-term impact. In this sense, Northern Ireland shows that the EU's peace identity can be very effective when it is embedded across several layers of society and institutionalised through everyday cooperation, even when its role remains largely invisible.

Cyprus, by contrast, brings into view the structural limits of the EU's inside-out

peace identity. Unlike in the Balkans, accession did not follow conflict resolution but preceded it. The Republic of Cyprus joined the EU in 2004, despite the failure of the UN-supported Annan Plan, leaving the island divided within the EU framework. This sharply reduced the Union's leverage, as the transformative power associated with accession conditionality was largely exhausted.

Since then, the EU has relied on regulatory and economic instruments, supporting confidence-building measures and encouraging cross-border interaction rather than high-level diplomatic mediation. Without a shared political framework for settlement, these tools have produced only limited transformation. The *acquis communautaire* remains suspended in the northern part of the island, and integration no longer functions as a meaningful incentive for conflict resolution.

Cyprus thus demonstrates that the EU's ability to enact its peace identity as a peace promoter is contingent on sequencing and context. Where institutional integration is decoupled from political settlement, the Union risks stabilising the status quo rather than transforming it. In such cases, its instruments remain present but politically less effective.

Taken together, these cases suggest that the EU's ability to act as a peace promoter is not fixed but context dependent. It has proven most effective in environments where security pressures are contained and where the EU can deploy its strength in structuring political dialogue and institutional compromise over time.

In the current geopolitical context, where defence and deterrence have re-entered the European political space, such conditions are increasingly difficult to sustain. The challenge for the EU, therefore, is to sustain, rather than abandon, its peace-promoting role under conditions in which mediation and security can no longer be treated as distinct domains.

European *Zeitenwende*: identity under pressure

Over the last 20 years, I have been drawn to early debates on Europe as a ‘civilian power’, most prominently those associated with François Duchêne. This concept captured a perceptual shift: Europe would seek influence not through military coercion but through dialogue and negotiation, law and integration. This idea resonated strongly with Germany’s foreign policy perspective (and thus this country was one of the most ardent supporters of civilian approaches to crisis management, including peace mediation). Civilian Europe reflected Europe’s legitimacy in foreign policy, which was inherently non-competitive. Power could be exercised through the institutionalisation of relationships rather than domination, that is, through structured political dialogue. Although the pooling of sovereignty once appeared improbable, it gradually materialised and went further than many could have imagined, producing a European foreign policy as the result of years of European political cooperation.

Waking in 2022 to the Russian invasion of Ukraine marked a geopolitical rupture that shattered the assumptions under which the European self-identification as a peace project had evolved. The term *Zeitenwende*, however overused, captures not only the shift in defence posture but also the deeper disturbance to Europe’s self-understanding.

The response was historically significant: the sanctions, military assistance, intensified defence coordination and renewed emphasis on deterrence signalled an EU willing to act with unprecedented resolve. Alongside this transformation, a broader and more consequential shift unfolded—the re-securitisation of European foreign policy, with far-reaching identity implications.

At the same time, less acknowledged but similarly decisive wake-up calls were occurring beyond Europe’s immediate neighbourhood. In the Sahel, a number of military coups articulated forceful claims to sovereignty, expelling long-standing partners and, with them, European presence and influence. In the African Great Lakes region, protracted conflicts resisted external UN and European stabilisation efforts.

Across the Atlantic the reliability of the US as an equal and consistent partner was increasingly called into question.

What is at stake is not just an adjustment of instruments or a simple reorientation of mechanisms such as the European Peace Facility, even if that facility is now used largely to support defence-capacity building. Rather, what has shifted is the relational environment in which European foreign policy is constituted. The 'other' against which the EU has historically defined itself is no longer singular, contained or predictable, but more open, confrontational and less inclined to favour negotiated restraint.

The European *Zeitenwende* condenses this shift as a recalibration of Europe's self-understanding. The EU, long accustomed to imagining itself primarily as a civilian and normative actor, now has to operate in an environment structured by open rivalry and coercive power politics. This does not render its self-identification as a peace actor obsolete but fundamentally alters the conditions under which such a role can be sustained. Peace can thus no longer be assumed to be the organising horizon of the European space or its foreign policy. It must instead be deliberately upheld within a context in which confrontation and deterrence have re-emerged as structuring conditions.

However, this should not lead to the conclusion that deterrence and defence ought to become the organising narratives of the EU's identity. If a discourse of security displaces the dialogue of peace entirely, the Union risks remaking itself in the image of the geopolitical logic it once sought to transcend. The essential task is to incorporate defence into a broader concept of disciplined power, without allowing securitisation to erode its peace mediation capacity or normative clarity.

The EU is thus being stretched in two directions: internally it was constituted as a peace project grounded in institutional compromise, yet externally it is increasingly required to take on a more defensive posture in response to the confrontational environment.

In this context, mediation becomes not a residual instrument of a bygone liberal

era, but a test of whether the EU can sustain its distinctiveness under pressure. When conflict is framed as existential, the political space narrows because the demand to take sides leaves little room for negotiated constraint. Compromise becomes politically suspect when Europe is confronted with such clear breaches of international law and sovereignty in its neighbourhood. Under such conditions, the support for peace mediation, or peacemaking, is easily cast as weakness and displaced to the margins. The question, then, is not whether Europe should strengthen its defence but whether its redefinition as a geopolitical actor erodes the peace project that once gave it its distinctiveness and strategic force.

Conclusion: can the EU maintain peace in times of structural rivalry?

What is at stake is the rearticulation of Europe's peace identity under conditions of structural rivalry. If that identity is to endure, it cannot be sustained through nostalgia but must be redefined within an increasingly competitive and fragmented geopolitical environment. Peace should not be mistaken for weakness; peace mediation is not a form of appeasement and negotiated order is not *naïveté*. The EU's distinctiveness lies in its relational power—its capacity to structure political space through rules, dialogue and institutionalised compromise.

In this sense, the Union's self-identification as a peace project, or its peace identity, is undergoing a shift. It is becoming less a reflection of how it positions itself against 'the other' (as it has been until recently) and much more a function of the conditions it actively creates and sustains. As such it is becoming an anchor not of contrast, but of the practices through which the EU structures political space. This shift is substantial, yet insufficiently recognised

What does this imply in concrete terms? Taken together, this rearticulation translates into four practical shifts in how the EU engages.

First, peacemaking can no longer be understood as a shared international project,

but must be sustained through deliberate political commitment and continuous engagement. This requires sustained investment in mediation, conflict prevention and long-term engagement—not because these approaches are reciprocated, but because they shape political environments over time. The EU's continued facilitation of the Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue, despite repeated setbacks, illustrates precisely this logic: engagement persists not because conditions are favourable, but because disengagement would further destabilise the political space.

Second, defence and peace engagement are no longer opposing logics, but mutually reinforcing dimensions of foreign policy. Deterrence provides protection and strategic space, while mediation and peacebuilding address the underlying political and societal dynamics that security instruments alone cannot resolve. This duality is visible in contexts such as Ukraine, where military support and deterrence measures coexist with ongoing diplomatic efforts and mediation support at multiple levels, including humanitarian negotiations and back-channel engagement.

Third, the relational power the EU has must be exercised more deliberately and pragmatically. The EU's ability to shape incentives, norms and institutional pathways has long been one of its defining strengths. In a more fragmented and contested environment, however, this capacity can no longer be assumed or applied uniformly. It must be directed strategically towards the achievement of combined peace and security objectives using a coherent framework that provides direction without reverting to over-institutionalised approaches. This will also require a shift in how engagement is understood: institutionalised dialogue and long-term frameworks remain important but are no longer sufficient on their own.

Fourth, the EU must be able to sustain its peace engagement even when internal divisions persist and external conditions become less favourable. In such contexts, security engagement often outpaces political dialogue, creating a risk of imbalance. The experience in the Sahel, where this has occurred, illustrates the risks of imbalance, but also highlights the need to maintain mediation capacity even in highly securitised environments.

Enlargement provides the clearest contemporary expression of this dynamic: the EU's ability to project its internal peace model outward, even when internal cohesion is incomplete and the external environment is increasingly conflictual. Even under conditions of division and external contestation, countries such as Ukraine, Moldova and those of the Western Balkans continue to orient themselves towards the Union. This reflects the enduring pull of the EU's internal peace model: a capacity to organise disagreement through institutional compromise, which continues to be projected outward even when the surrounding environment becomes more conflictual.

The tension is now structural.

The EU must remain attractive because of its internal peace model—its capacity to organise disagreement through institutionalised compromise—while sustaining that model in an environment that is increasingly shaped by confrontation and deterrence. What was once projected outward, as a relatively uncontested order, is now operating amid competing visions of political organisation. The paradox, is simple but decisive: the EU must preserve the conditions of its peace model internally, while it can no longer assume them externally.

From this perspective, the development of security and defence capacities does not stand in opposition to the EU's normative foundations. On the contrary, it reinforces a long-standing insight: peaceful internal cohesion remains the precondition for external capacity. In times of global disorder, ensuring this cohesion requires political discipline. Defence and diplomacy will have to co-develop without allowing securitisation to crowd out the Union's peace mediation capacity. Investment in mediation, conflict prevention and peacebuilding must advance alongside military capability—not least because peacebuilding begins where military outcomes end.

Ultimately, the EU's credibility as a peace actor rests on its ability to practise what it seeks to project. A Union that ceases to organise disagreement internally cannot do so externally. The EU's challenge is not to choose between peace and power, but to align them without losing the logic that made it a peace project in the first place. Its future as a peace-promoting actor depends on whether it can sustain its capacity

to organise disagreement in a world that no longer shares that premise. To abandon this discipline would be to relinquish the very distinctiveness that gives the EU its strategic meaning—its power and, ultimately, its identity.

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About the author

Dr Antje Herrberg is an international relations scholar and peace mediation practitioner, and a long-term visiting professor at the College of Europe. Her work has long focused on European foreign policy and conflict resolution, and early in her career she became an expert on the relationship between the EU and the former Soviet Union. Over the past 15 years she has studied questions of peacemaking and political order, both analytically and in practice, also serving in the field as well as with EU institutions. She has played a shaping role in the development of the EU's peace-mediation concept, including within the European External Action Service, and in the consolidation of the institutional presence in this field. Her work brings together long-standing engagement with the EU's evolving peace role, mediation practice and the changing geopolitical conditions under which the European peace identity is being redefined.



The Tools of Peace (II):

Inventions Along the Way

Alain Lamassoure

Along the way and spurred on by crises, in the debate between and within European institutions, and sometimes in order to extricate themselves from intractable situations, the key players have gradually discovered, devised, refined and applied procedures, interpretations, methods and even stratagems which, all other things being equal, facilitate compromise. It is often the case that the subsequent treaty then takes these procedures into account. This is how, day by day, the European art of living together in peace is forged.

European political parties

The development of transnational political cooperation in the European Parliament began with the formation of parliamentary groups in the Strasbourg Assembly. Even before the Parliament was elected by direct universal suffrage, parliamentarians from the various member states had become accustomed to organising themselves into groups according to their political affinities. Quite naturally, however, the Rules of Procedure required any such group to include a minimum number of members, drawn from several countries. Today, a political group must comprise at least 23 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) elected in at least one-quarter of the member states.¹

After 1979, with the introduction of full-time MEPs, the coordination of speeches and votes became a political imperative for each of the groups. The stakes have continued to rise as the Parliament's powers have expanded, treaty after treaty. Through the old 'Internationals', left-wing parties already had a long tradition of meeting and exchanging views, between Social Democrats on the one hand and the more Marxist European left on the other. Christian Democrats and conservatives eventually came together within a single group. The greens readily embraced a European identity. The Liberal Democrats joined forces and were subsequently renamed as part of Renew. These main groups have shaped the debates in the Parliament. Given the differences in national interests on certain issues, a political group in the European

1 K. Baranik, *Rules on Political Groups in the European Parliament*, European Parliamentary Research Service Briefing, PE 762.337 (14 June 2024).

Parliament cannot demand such strict voting discipline as in a national assembly. Yet the results achieved by the major groups are quite remarkable: 80% of the members of the European People's Party regularly vote in line with its instructions.

These results were made possible by the creation of genuine European political parties. Until then, within their respective parliamentary groups, MEPs had been somewhat 'detached from the ground'. Some were too disconnected from national politics, whilst others, on the contrary, were too subservient to national party leaders, who were largely impervious to the European dimension of the issues at stake. It was necessary to infuse the spirit of Europe into national politics and, conversely, to enable each political family to have a European agenda worthy of the name. In the 1990s, under the strong personal impetus of Helmut Kohl, the German Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union in Bavaria (Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands/Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern) brought together the centre-right forces—Christian Democrats and conservatives—in the European People's Party, thereby launching the movement.

Thirty years on, the results of this effort have been mixed.

On the one hand, all political families have established European parties. These have been granted institutional status. They are entitled to financial support from the Union, not only for their day-to-day operations but also for foundations responsible for policy research and the training of elected representatives. Even the Eurosceptic parties have thus joined the fray: in 2026 three different parliamentary groups share the far-right benches. The largest parties organise summits of their leaders ahead of European Council meetings, and ministerial meetings ahead of the most important Councils of Ministers. These are another tool—discreet but useful—for seeking compromise.

On the other hand, however, European political parties have never managed to unite national parties. For the most part, the European election campaign is waged by national parties under their own national banners. The media, like political leaders, regard these elections as a European pretext for gauging the balance of power

within their own countries. Despite the efforts of the Brussels' leadership to draw up programmes common to the whole family of parties, the references, arguments and other 'punchlines' remain tailored to national audiences. A reflection of this inherent weakness: 20 years after the Treaty of Lisbon, it is still the European Council that has the final say—and not the first, as stipulated by the treaty—in selecting the president of the Commission.

The art of EU negotiation

Historians have highlighted the extent to which, ever since the League of Nations, international organisations have drawn on the British parliamentary tradition. Attempting to reconcile conflicting interests or opinions through debate and reaching a decision by vote has required a long period of practical learning. Whether among representatives of the same country or in an international setting, the techniques ultimately vary little. But what sets the EU apart is that negotiations take place constantly at every level and on every subject—sometimes between civil servants, sometimes between diplomats, sometimes between ministers, sometimes between parliamentarians and sometimes among all of them at once. A few negotiation techniques stand out in particular.

The first is the agenda rule. Once agreement has been reached on the order of the items to be discussed, the people around the table, the venue for the meetings and the final deadline, 80% of the negotiation is in the bag. That is, therefore, where you need to start. This method is particularly essential when the EU has to negotiate with an external partner. A textbook example remains the negotiations on the treaty between the UK and the EU to finalise Brexit. The key to the negotiations lay in London's ability to divide the 27 member states—a well-honed art for the UK Foreign Office and a major fear at the Berlaymont, the Commission's headquarters in Brussels. Prime Minister Boris Johnson decided to place sea fishing at the top of his agenda. It was an issue easy to sell to the media, with images of the proud Royal Navy escorting British fishermen who were not asking for much. For its part, the EU insisted on addressing the debt that the UK had accumulated with the Union first. The total amounted to tens of billions of euros. As its repayment would benefit each of the 27 member states, it was difficult to find a more

unifying issue amongst them. Having failed to secure a suitable initial agreement, it was several years and several UK governments before a satisfactory *modus vivendi* could be reached with the EU. Having become accustomed to closing ranks from the very first day of negotiations, the 27 maintained this stance right to the end. In doing so, they developed expertise that has proved invaluable for jointly tackling the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Russian aggression in Ukraine and President Trump's disruptive outbursts.

Another basic rule is 'nothing without everything'. Once the agenda, the list of participants and the timetable have been set, negotiations proceed item by item, recording points of agreement as they arise—otherwise it would be impossible to make progress—whilst making it clear from the very first point that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed: otherwise, the first party to make a concession would find itself caught up in the vicious circle of 'salami tactics'.

Community-level negotiation also highlights the 'best ally paradox'. In a bilateral negotiation between two parties, each of which consists of a coalition, ultimate success depends on the ability of the two heads of delegation to understand that this common interest binds them more closely to one another than either is bound to their respective delegations. This is typically the case in the confrontation between the Council of Ministers and a parliamentary delegation. Historians recount this paradox and diplomats practise it to bring an end to conflicts between hostile peoples. Leaders who choose peace are initially hated by their own camp. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin both paid for this with their lives, each at the hands of their own people. Everyday life within the Union shows that this rule also applies to issues with less dramatic consequences.

When political deadlock becomes paralysing, a way out can be found through a nuanced interpretation of the treaties. One extraordinary example is that provided by the *multiannual financial framework* (MFF).

Under the Treaty of Rome, the only real power the Parliamentary Assembly—later the European Parliament—had in budgetary matters was an overall vote on the Community's annual budget.

As soon as it felt empowered by the legitimacy conferred on it as a result of its election by universal suffrage, the Parliament used and abused this sole weapon, resorting to rejection on principle. In the early 1980s, a series of bittersweet conflicts between MEPs and ministers ensued, involving the Court of Justice and leading to institutional paralysis. The Commission then resorted to a subterfuge. The three institutions signed an agreement amongst themselves on how to interpret the Treaty, which remained unchanged. This agreement was called the MFF. This framework set—and still sets—annual budgetary allocations for broad categories of Community policies for a period of seven years. It is adopted unanimously by the Council, subject to the Parliament's approval en bloc by a qualified majority. Each annual budget must fall within the framework, unless the same political conditions are met to amend it.

What divine ambiguity! The Parliament pretends to believe that the figures in the framework are a guaranteed minimum over seven years, the Council regards them as maximums and the Commission plays Don Juan, keeping both 'shepherdesses' in the dark. The budget has never been rejected since. The MFF formula was eventually incorporated into the Lisbon Treaty in 2007. This means that for 20 years, the Union's entire budgetary life was organised outside the scope of 'hard' law. Yet no country or political group brought the flimsiness of the legal basis on which taxpayers were asked to fund European policies before the Court of Justice.

Another provision that is not provided for in the treaties is the hearing of commissioner-designates by the European Parliament.

Curiously, whilst its legislative powers were long curtailed, the Parliament has, from the outset, had the same powers as its national counterparts in relation to the executive: it votes to approve the appointment of the president of the Commission, then that of the Commission as a whole, and it can bring the Commission down with a vote of no confidence. The walls of the Berlaymont, the Commission's headquarters, are still shaking from the day in 1999 when the College chaired by Jacques Santer resigned en masse after losing the confidence of the Parliament.

The confirmation of the president of the Commission is, in fact, the first vote taken by a new Parliament. This is followed by the appointment of the Commission's members. As commissioner-designates had become accustomed to appearing, as a matter of courtesy, before the relevant parliamentary committees, in 2004 the Parliament decided to subject them to an official public hearing procedure. Modelled on the hearings to which heads of the federal administration are subjected before the US Senate, this hearing is a gruelling three-hour ordeal. Following a seven-minute introductory presentation, the candidate is subjected to a barrage of questions from the members of the parliamentary committee, in the order defined by the d'Hondt method. At the end of the hearing, the relevant parliamentarians vote by secret ballot on the candidate's eligibility. The aim is to ensure the nominee's competence, as well as his or her ability to work in line with the political stance of the relevant parliamentary committee. Of course, the chairs of the Council and the Committee are not legally bound to follow the parliamentary recommendation, but as the final vote on the nominee's appointment by the College is at stake, in practice a 'red light' is a deal-breaker.

On the whole, the Parliament has exercised this new power with reasonable restraint. It has managed to set aside negative preconceptions about candidates with a Eurosceptic past or limited political experience whose vetting proved convincing; it has not allowed itself to be swayed by the esteem a candidate has previously earned within its ranks when it has doubts about his or her professional ethics; and it has discreetly informed certain governments that their first choice might be poorly received, so as to spare them a political snub.

As the candidates for commissioners are nominated by governments, the Council of Ministers has never envisaged the setting up of a parallel procedure, which would give each government the power to challenge the candidates put forward by others. Thus, by subjecting the commissioners to this ordeal, the Parliament takes the initiative to forge political and personal ties that will prove invaluable throughout the parliamentary term.

Implement first, ratify later

Legal ingenuity can also help to turn things around after an unfortunate political blunder.

It is Monday, 24 June 2016. A few days prior, the European Commission had signed the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), a free-trade agreement with Canada that it had been negotiating for years.² The day before, in an unrelated referendum, a narrow majority of British voters had voted in favour of 'Brexit'. Fearing that their victory might signal an equally strong wave of Euroscepticism elsewhere, and under pressure from Paris and Berlin, the Commission decided that CETA—which had been legally presented and negotiated as a 'European treaty'—would be treated politically as a 'mixed treaty'. As the Union has exclusive competence over trade, purely trade treaties are classified as European, and their entry into force is conditional only upon ratification by the European Parliament. However, if, beyond trade, the text addresses matters of shared competence (culture, intellectual property, security etc.), the treaty is termed 'mixed' and requires ratification by all the national parliaments. However, whilst securing unanimity amongst the governments is an uphill struggle, achieving unanimity amongst the parliaments is a real ordeal: several states have bicameral parliaments, and Belgium takes federalism so far as to boast eight parliamentary assemblies, all of which have to ratify this kind of 'mixed' treaty. A few months later, the Walloon Parliament rejected CETA.

The European Parliament's indignation and the Canadians' consternation at this hasty reclassification helped to get the process back on track—a track that it should never have left in the first place. The president of the European Council and the Canadian prime minister met shortly afterwards in Brussels to announce that the treaty would enter into provisional application following ratification by the European Parliament. This took place in September 2017. It was then agreed to take stock of

2 EU, 'Notice Concerning the Provisional Application of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) Between Canada, of the One Part, and the European Union and Its Member States, of the Other Part', OJ L238 (16 September 2017), 9.

the situation once the national ratifications had been completed. But this time, the Commission, having regained its optimism, considered the vote in Strasbourg to have settled 90% of the text's content. Ultimately, the question of national ratification became absorbed into this lengthy and complicated procedure.

Nine years later, nobody cares about the ratifications anymore. In the meantime, it has become clear that the Walloon 'black sheep' has rejoined the flock. The French National Assembly voted in favour, whilst the Senate opposed it, but the Senate does not have the final say. Cyprus is the only parliament whose final vote was negative, but the authorities in Brussels were never officially notified of this result. The implementation of the treaty has proved extremely beneficial for European exporters, including French farmers. No one in France dares to boast about it, but no one has been able to stop it.

The use of provisional application often provokes the wrath of legal experts: clearly, this Europe is not democratic; it makes a mockery of the people. Yet putting an agreement into provisional application provides a way of testing its merits in practice. Had the disasters predicted by the Cassandras actually materialised, or had a distinctly protectionist government emerged among the 27 member states, the process could obviously have been halted. In January 2026 the European Parliament's request for an opinion from the Court of Justice on the EU–Mercosur agreements did not prevent the EU from proceeding with the provisional application of another major agreement, negotiated over many years with Mercosur.³

Among these legal innovations, the *European Convention* deserves special mention. Alongside the European Council, it is one of the most significant political innovations to have emerged outside the treaties. Not the least remarkable aspect is that it arose spontaneously between the three Community institutions.

3 European Parliament, 'Resolution Seeking an Opinion From the Court of Justice on the Compatibility With the Treaties of the Proposed EU–Mercosur Partnership Agreement and Interim Trade Agreement', P10_TA(2026)0008 (21 January 2026).

The Convention originated in the German government's desire to balance its 1999 EU Presidency—which was largely dominated by defence issues, with the Kosovo War in full swing—with an initiative on fundamental rights. The national governments agreed to establish a working body, with each naturally wishing to appoint its own representative. At the same time, the subject was more a matter for lawyers than for professional diplomats. The European Parliament insisted on being represented. The British were unenthusiastic about the exercise but, as usual, demanded—and secured—the participation of their national parliament and an assurance that the final outcome would not be legally binding upon them. António Vitorino, the European commissioner who had taken part in the preparatory Council discussions, became an *ex officio* member of the body.

The body was initially given the rather vague name of an 'enceinte'—or simply a 'body' in English. Parliament encountered little opposition when it proposed the more dignified—and, given its constitutional overtones, slightly mischievous—name of 'Convention'. Germany happened to be represented by one of its most distinguished jurists: Roman Herzog, former president of the Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe, former president of the Federal Republic of Germany and a recipient of the Charlemagne Prize. He was unanimously elected president of the Convention.

This small assembly was cobbled together in a hurry: an equal number of MEPs and government representatives, twice as many national parliamentarians as MEPs, and a commissioner tagging along. All the members were delighted to be taking part in a 'first'. Their roadmap, set out by the Cologne European Council, was precise enough to establish a framework, yet vague enough to allow for a measured degree of boldness: to compile a list of all the human rights recognised in our respective states, whilst not restricting themselves to working solely within the existing legal framework. Above all, they were spurred on by the *de facto* timetable imposed upon them: in parallel, and to the same timetable, governments were negotiating the adaptation of the European treaties to enable the Union to expand to include the former Communist states. Work on the Convention took place throughout the year 2000.

Everything about this endeavour was improvised. For practical reasons, the meetings took place at the European Parliament in Brussels, but the process fell outside the scope of normal EU proceedings. The government representatives were not the 'usual suspects', such as the permanent representatives, and most did not even have precise instructions from their capitals. The national parliamentarians felt out of their depth in a setting where their European counterparts were on home turf, naturally imposing their own working methods and ultimately playing a major role in shaping the final text. It all came together eventually. On 7 December 2000, the rain in Nice simultaneously blessed the new treaty, adopted by the European Council, and the text of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which was the subject of a 'joint proclamation' by the Council, the Parliament and the Commission.

The ink on the Treaty of Nice had not dried before its authors realised that it was flawed. To their credit, they also understood the reason for this fiasco—it lay in the working method, which is standard practice when negotiating a treaty, even a European one: a group of diplomats representing their respective governments is brought together, with an approach whose starting point and end goal are the preservation of national interests. Yet, despite this, it was the success of the negotiations for the Convention that demonstrated the ability to forge a genuine European consensus on other, no less complex issues. For the first time, the Parliament saw the possibility of participating from day one in the drafting of a European treaty. Its proposal to entrust the drafting of this new treaty to a new Convention was taken up by the European Council under the Belgian Presidency. In keeping with Franco-German friendship, following former German President Herzog's chairmanship of the previous Convention, the presidency was entrusted to former French president, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. Thus the path to consensus was laid.

The art of consensus

Finding consensus is the delicate art of diplomacy. It involves allowing a compromise to go ahead that one cannot endorse, approve or reject, at a moment when one is too politically isolated to prevent it. Consensus is to politics what Schrödinger's cat is to

quantum mechanics: a fortunate discovery, best kept hidden from the general public so as not to upset or outrage them. In this case, the little cat is silent in Brussels, but purrs in the national capital. If everyone is happy with the outcome, why make a fuss?

A good consensus is therefore one that allows a political actor—usually a government—to conceal the fact that it has been outvoted in Brussels. There are several ways to achieve this. Members of Parliament in every country are already familiar with the subtle difference between abstention, that is, refusing to take part in the vote, and simply being absent at the time of the vote. A minister isolated in the Council may try to ensure that there is no formal vote on the matter, knowing full well that the minutes will nevertheless state that the text has thus been adopted. A masterpiece of consensus was achieved when Herman Van Rompuy, the first president of the European Council elected by his peers, secured the adoption of the MFF for the period 2014–20. Using the very ‘Brussels-style’ method of the ‘confessional’, he took each head of government aside to fully understand and address their national priorities. He did not formally open the European Council until two days later, and when he did it was merely to note that, as everyone had given their agreement in private, the MFF was deemed to have been adopted. Without any prior debate, vote or explanation of vote! Back home, each member of the summit was able to claim that their priorities had been taken on board, whilst attributing any disappointments to the Presidency.

President Giscard d’Estaing achieved a comparable feat at the conclusion of the Convention on the Future of Europe in the spring of 2003. While the subsequent rejection of the draft Constitutional Treaty by referendum in France and the Netherlands cast doubt on the merits of the method, several participants nevertheless emphasised its remarkable effectiveness during the drafting process. The task was no easy one: it involved bringing together some 200 leading figures representing the European institutions and the governments and national parliaments of the 15 member states and 13 candidate countries, including Türkiye. Let us focus here on the way in which the draft was steered through the Convention.

To take the lead, the chair secured the support of a dozen of the finest legal experts from the younger generation in Europe. From then on, he had control over the first draft of all texts put forward for debate, but refrained from presenting them himself. He set up a multi-tiered process, ensuring that he retained control over the burden of proof. When a text came before the body's bureau, the burden of proof to the contrary fell on those opposing its arguments. Once established, the bureau's position was then imposed on the working groups, unless they could demonstrate the contrary. The working groups' conclusions were similarly imposed on the plenary session, whose conclusions were drawn by the chair himself, without putting them to a vote. Thus, it was he who passed the hot potato, and it came back to him cold.

After 18 months of work, on the final day, no one knew how the final text would be adopted. Never mind procedure: the chair declared it as such, triggering prolonged applause. At the time, the Eurosceptics were very much in the minority. Impressed by this emotional outpouring, they contented themselves with publishing a very brief text stating 'that they were not part of the consensus'. They were not part of it, but they did not dispute its existence: politics, in this instance, does indeed resemble quantum mechanics.

The powers of a parliamentary committee of inquiry

This revealed a gap in the treaty framework governing the European Parliament's powers of inquiry. Article 226 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union allows Parliament to establish a temporary committee of inquiry to investigate a particular matter. However, neither the Treaty nor the applicable rules give Parliament a general power to compel individuals to appear and give evidence: fundamental individual rights are at stake. This limitation became particularly acute with the revelation of the 'LuxLeaks' scandal. In November 2014 it emerged that Luxembourg had granted preferential tax rulings to multinational companies, enabling many European and American corporations to substantially reduce their corporate tax liabilities.

Such a breach of the principle of fair competition between tax systems called into question the proper functioning of the single market. The Parliament therefore set up a special committee to supplement the national judicial investigation and propose remedies. But how could companies be compelled to appear? A selection of European and American multinationals were invited to a committee hearing. State-owned companies could not refuse, so their private competitors lacked the grounds to decline the invitation. However, it took more than that to impress the major American multinationals and their armies of lawyers: they replied by return post that they were under no obligation to answer to the European Parliament. In response, the Parliament announced that it would amend its Rules of Procedure so that officials or representatives of companies refusing to cooperate with it would be barred from entering its premises. The European Commission made the same announcement. Twenty-four hours later, the recalcitrant companies changed their minds. A global company could hardly afford to be blacklisted by the European institutions, especially at a time when the mainstream press was heavily focused on the scandal.

The twenty-eighth regime: Europe plus

After 30 years of free movement within the Schengen Area and almost as long since the eurozone's inception, European citizens living in a country other than their country of origin still face enormous administrative difficulties in their daily lives. For a Finn married to a Czech or an Italian woman, working in Slovenia, Poland or Ireland — after having his professional qualification recognised and having raised a child born in Portugal or Germany — life is infinitely more complicated than it is for a Texan or a Californian to change family, profession and place of residence whilst becoming a homeowner in Massachusetts or Wyoming. Over the course of her career, an engineer with the Airbus Group might first be recruited in Hamburg, promoted to Broughton, then to Toulouse, and end up in Seville. In each location, her employment rights will be different. When the time comes, calculating her pension will be a real headache. In the event of a divorce between spouses of different nationalities, it is common for the civil courts of the two states to reach conflicting decisions regarding child custody. Furthermore, bioethical rules, such as the recognition of rights for same-

sex couples, remain very different from one country to another. It is hard to imagine more painful issues for those concerned. So much so that the 16 million citizens who can be regarded as Europe's pioneers—those who have exercised their freedom of movement by settling in another member state—are among the main victims of the shortcomings in its organisation. Their daily lives are not a major priority in Brussels.

It must be said that this does not really fall within the Union's remit. EU law plays only a very limited role, if any at all, in areas as important to individuals as labour law, health, family law, housing, or town and country planning. The election of the European Parliament by universal suffrage and the right to vote granted to EU citizens in European elections have not changed the status quo, nor have they altered public attitudes. The use of proportional representation within large constituencies does not help: expatriate Europeans are too few in number, too diverse and too scattered across a territory to constitute a significant electoral force. Legal experts describe this sort of situation as a 'negative conflict': no jurisdiction considers it to be within its remit. The damage is less visible than that caused by 'positive conflicts', where two authorities overlap, interfere with one another and may contradict each other, but it is no less serious.

One solution might be to transfer whole new areas of law to the Union in order to unify everything that can be unified. This is, of course, out of the question: national parliaments would be quick to invoke the principle of subsidiarity, and rightly so. Europeans have therefore devised another approach: the 'twenty-eighth regime' (this figure applying within the circle of 27 member states). This involves, on a given subject, adopting a European rule which, rather than replacing the 27 national rules, is an option available to all—whether individuals or legal entities—across the 27 countries. For matters as diverse as marriage, employment contracts and setting up a business, why not offer a choice between the national regime and a European rule? Both families and multinational companies might find this highly beneficial.

This is not simply a gimmick designed to make the institutions' work easier; quite the contrary, it is intended to help simplify people's everyday lives. On the part of

the institutions, this requires a new mindset. Thus, an initial experiment in family law led, in 2010, to a regulation establishing a European regime for divorce and legal separation. However, this regulation still only applies to the 17 member states that have accepted it under enhanced cooperation.

In 2025, following the urgent recommendations of the reports by Enrico Letta and Mario Draghi, the second von der Leyen Commission relaunched a proposal for a twenty-eighth regime on business law.⁴ According to the Commission president, ‘barriers within Europe cause us more harm than customs tariffs from outside’.⁵ Consequently, whilst many startups are established within Europe, they rarely remain there. Between 2008 and 2021, 30% of European ‘unicorns’ (startups valued at over one billion dollars in turnover) left the EU to set up in the US.⁶

Under this new regime, companies will thus be able to opt for a European legal framework with minimal red tape, enabling them to operate throughout the Union, as in a true single market, without having to comply with 27 different national regimes. This approach should lead to the introduction of a proposal for an appropriate tax regime.

Pilot projects

All those committed to democracy frown upon the fact that the European Parliament has no legal right of legislative initiative, and they are outraged to see its budgetary powers so severely limited. Conceived as a compensatory consolation for elected representatives, the ‘pilot projects and compensatory measures’ scheme has an unexpected benefit: it fosters constant competition amongst the major parliamentary

4 M. Draghi, *The Future of European Competitiveness: Part A – A Competitiveness Strategy for Europe*, European Commission (Brussels, 9 September 2024); E. Letta, *Much More Than a Market: Speed, Security, Solidarity – Empowering the Single Market to Deliver a Sustainable Future and Prosperity for All EU Citizens* (April 2024).

5 U. von der Leyen, speech made during the European Parliament plenary debate on the Conclusions of the European Council Meeting of 20 March 2025, Strasbourg, 1 April 2025.

6 Draghi, *The Future of European Competitiveness*.

groups to devise new initiatives that break free from traditional bureaucratic constraints.

A pilot project is an experimental initiative designed to test the feasibility and usefulness of a measure. It lasts for no more than two years. If the experiment proves successful, it is continued as a preparatory action, leading to EU legislation or a programme, with funding for this phase lasting no more than three years. This framework might raise concerns that it opens up new areas to elected representatives' penchant for regulation. However, this risk is limited by the strictness of the procedure. The total amount of commitment appropriations may not exceed €40 million per year for pilot projects and €100 million per year for preparatory actions, of which no more than €50 million may be allocated to new preparatory actions. In addition, proposed projects undergo rigorous scrutiny by the Commission, which assesses their feasibility and whether they overlap with existing EU programmes before they are considered in the annual budgetary procedure.⁷

Among the wide variety of pilot projects, a few clearly illustrate the value of this approach. In 1999, following nine years of Balkan wars, the European Council felt the need to create the post of high representative for foreign policy, which was assigned to Javier Solana. Unenthusiastic about this innovation, which they saw as encroaching on their own powers, the Commission and the foreign ministers sought to limit the financial resources allocated to the post. Seeing that the high representative was reduced to having his official travel expenses paid for by a private foundation, the Parliament launched a pilot project. In practice, the post proved to be necessary. It was formalised and expanded in the Treaty of Lisbon. A few years later, following a spate of Islamist terrorist attacks in several European cities, the process was repeated with the establishment of a high representative for internal security. This time, the experiment was not deemed successful, and the role was incorporated into the subsequent Commission. Similarly, in 2021 a pilot project paved the way for new methods to combat doping in sport, but it did not lead to the creation of a Community

7 S. Mazur, 'Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions in the EU's Annual Budgetary Procedure', European Parliamentary Research Service, At a Glance, PE 762.365 (July 2024), 1.

body, as the World Anti-Doping Agency and national agencies were already in place.

Different matters result in different conclusions. The pilot project to create a European Institute for Peace paved the way for the existence of this body, which operates with the utmost discretion and is highly regarded for its mediation in the most difficult conflicts. At the time of its formation, it did not seem possible to give it a Community character: it was established as an intergovernmental body. However, it would be surprising if the Union's growing influence in the 'arts of war' did not lead to changes in its status and activities.

The duty of courtesy: the article written in invisible ink

Finally, there is the fifty-sixth article of a treaty that contains only 55. During the first 40 years of the European Parliament, an unwritten rule applied—one not set out in the treaties or in the Rules of Procedure: in debates, MEPs observe diplomatic courtesy and never speak of the past.

Thus, life in the European Parliament divergences in two major ways from national parliamentary life. Everywhere else, parliamentary life is fuelled by historical references, and the vehemence of arguments very quickly escalates into verbal abuse and personal attacks. But whilst our shared past has contained some brilliant chapters, it also includes all the hatred that has existed between Europeans, and contemporary politicians can do nothing to change that. We leave that to the historians. If we meet in Strasbourg and Brussels, it is to build the future together. It is entirely up to us to ensure that this is a future of peace and freedom.

Similarly, given the weight of history, it is unthinkable for a French person to insult a German—or, for that matter, any foreign colleague. MEPs instinctively adopt the courtesy expected in diplomatic exchanges. This has never prevented the debates from being heated. But a spirit of conciliation is present throughout proceedings, and the absence of personal attacks saves a great deal of time. Nor should we

forget that multilingualism, taken to the point of simultaneous interpretation, renders parliamentary eloquence futile. What oratory loses, tolerance gains. This is one of the little-known secrets behind the efficiency of the European legislative machinery.

This glowing assessment does, however, have two caveats. But these may only be temporary.

First, it is easy for MEPs to see eye to eye as long as they are not competing for promotions, either within the Parliament itself or within the European executive. As we have seen, parliamentary posts are allocated according to the d'Hondt method, whilst the composition of the executive Commission is strictly regulated, with one member per country—and it is the national governments that have the final say on the names put forward. Thus while there is competition between individuals, it is confined either to within parliamentary groups or to between nationals of the same country.

Second, the rising polarisation in national politics has led, since 2019 and especially since 2024, to the election in Strasbourg of extremist MEPs more intent on fighting than on mending fences. Debates have become more heated. But even these loudmouths are discovering that it is better to avoid bringing up contentious historical memories with elected representatives from other countries, if only because it enables a parliamentary group to be formed. Let us say that this is a slightly lesser evil: the hatred expressed is directed not at a nationality, but at an ideology.

These examples have been gathered over the course of his career by a former member of the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. This volume also contains analyses by several other former practitioners. My purpose is not to offer a scientific assessment, but rather the testimony of an engaged participant. Each of the propositions put forward here is therefore open to debate. This also means that this collection of 'tools for peace' deserves to be greatly expanded, drawing on the experience of other elected representatives, parliamentarians, former ministers and ambassadors, officials from the European institutions and agencies, judges of the Court of Justice and members of national parliaments, as well as journalists, lobbyists and others.

Like the cathedrals of the Middle Ages, the political construction of Europe is a collective endeavour whose building will take a century—and what a century it will be! The final monument will no doubt look very different from what the architects of the first sketches had envisaged. In the age of artificial intelligence, the collective and largely anonymous work of successive generations of masons, craftsmen and surveyors continues. Let us listen to them if we are to understand.

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About the author

Alain Lamassoure is a former French Minister for European Affairs and Minister for the Budget, and a former Member of the European Parliament, where he served from 1989 to 1993 and from 1999 to 2019. He chaired the European Parliament's Committee on Budgets and participated in the Convention on the Future of Europe in 2002–3. He is currently Chair of the Scientific Council of the Robert Schuman Foundation and Chair of the Governing Board of the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe.



Redefining Peace:

Asynchronous Enlargement and
European Integration after Ukraine

Teona Lavrelashvili

EU enlargement has long been understood as the Union's most effective instrument for peacebuilding. From the democratic transitions of Southern Europe in the 1980s to the post-Communist transformations of Central and Eastern Europe, enlargement functioned as a mechanism of stabilisation through conditionality, legal convergence and institutional embedding. In this classical understanding, enlargement functioned as the broadening of a security community: a region in which shared expectations of peaceful change are institutionalised and war becomes both materially costly and normatively unthinkable.¹ Peace, in this model, was not imposed through coercion, but constructed through governance, interdependence and rules-based integration.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has reinserted enlargement into the centre of European politics. Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia were granted candidate status under unprecedented wartime conditions, marking a decisive shift in both the speed and framing of EU enlargement policy. Enlargement, once slowed by 'enlargement fatigue' and institutional caution, has been reframed as a strategic necessity. European leaders increasingly describe membership as a 'geostrategic investment' in stability and security, while the language of deterrence, resilience and geopolitical order has become central to enlargement discourse.²

This development does not simply revive enlargement; it transforms its meaning. Under conditions of geopolitical urgency, the war in Ukraine has accelerated the widening of the EU. But it has left the deepening of the Union—the internal consolidation of institutional, fiscal and rule-of-law capacities—comparatively incremental, contested and uneven. The result is a growing disjuncture between external expansion and internal adaptation.

This chapter argues that Ukraine's candidacy reveals a structural shift in the temporal

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- 1 E. Adler and M. Barnett (eds.), *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 37–8.
 - 2 See V. Anghel and J. Džankić, 'Wartime EU: Consequences of the Russia–Ukraine War on the Enlargement Process', *Journal of European Integration* 45/3 (2023); N. Scicluna, 'Framing Enlargement after the Russian Invasion of Ukraine: Between Geopolitical Drivers and Procedural Roadblocks', *Journal of European Public Policy* 32/12 (2025); T. Lavrelashvili, 'How to Make EU Enlargement Work? A Grass-Roots Approach to Strategic Preparations', *European View* 23/1 (2024).

logic of enlargement. Classical enlargement operated through a sequential model of transformation-before-membership. Wartime enlargement introduces pressures for strategic acceleration, producing what can be conceptualised as asynchronous enlargement: a misalignment between widening and deepening. Thus, the sustainability of enlargement as a peace project now depends on synchronisation—the temporal alignment between external expansion and internal consolidation. Synchronisation is conceptualised here not as a policy prescription, but as a structural condition for maintaining peace under conditions of accelerated geopolitical integration.

By advancing this argument, the chapter contributes to three strands of literature: scholarship on enlargement and conditionality, which highlights the EU's transformative power; debates on widening and deepening in European integration theory; and emerging work on the EU's geopolitical turn.³ It argues that with Ukraine's membership, enlargement redefines the European peace project by altering its temporal, strategic and conceptual foundations.

Enlargement as liberal-transformative peace

The classical enlargement model was embedded in a liberal institutionalist understanding of peace, combining insights from democratic peace theory and theories of institutional integration. At its core, this model assumed that peace could be produced through the transformation of domestic political systems and their incorporation into a rules-based supranational order. Candidate states were therefore required to meet the Copenhagen criteria—stable democratic institutions, rule of law, respect for minorities and a functioning market economy—prior to accession. Compliance was incentivised by the credible promise of membership, which functioned as a powerful mechanism of external influence and political alignment.

3 F. Schimmelfennig, 'The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union', *International Organization* 55/1 (2001); U. Sedelmeier, *Constructing the Path to Eastern Enlargement: The Uneven Policy Impact of EU Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); R. D. Kelemen, A. Menon and J. B. Slapin, 'Wider and Deeper? Enlargement and Integration in the European Union', *Journal of European Public Policy* 21/5 (2014); V. Anghel and E. Jones, *From Club to Commons: Enlargement, Reform and Sustainability in European Integration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025).

As demonstrated by Schimmelfennig, the effectiveness of this model relied on the credibility of conditionality and the reputational costs associated with non-compliance.⁴ Sedelmeier further showed that conditionality worked because candidate countries perceived EU membership as highly valuable, while the EU possessed robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.⁵ Enlargement thus operated as an instrument of external governance, allowing the EU to shape domestic institutions beyond its borders. Börzel and Schimmelfennig later characterised this process as the EU's most effective form of transformative power, through which it exported norms, institutions and governance practices.⁶

In this framework, peace was produced through a clear and sequential logic. First, domestic transformation occurred through compliance with EU norms. Second, accession formalised this transformation within the EU's institutional structure. Third, stabilisation emerged through integration into a system of mutual constraint and interdependence. Enlargement expanded a zone of institutionalised trust, where political conflicts were resolved through legal and procedural means rather than coercion.

Importantly, the EU did not project power territorially in the traditional geopolitical sense. Instead, it diffused norms through rules-based inclusion and conditional access. As highlighted in the literature on EU peacebuilding, this approach relied primarily on non-military instruments—legal harmonisation, economic integration and institutional reform—to prevent conflict and stabilise neighbouring regions.⁷ In this sense, peace was generated less by coercive control than by the diffusion of governance practices.

Security community theory provides the conceptual underpinning for this process. Adler and Barnett argue that security communities emerge when states develop dependable expectations of peaceful change through dense institutional interaction

4 Schimmelfennig, 'The Community Trap'.

5 Sedelmeier, *Constructing the Path to Eastern Enlargement*.

6 T. A. Börzel and F. Schimmelfennig, 'Coming Together or Drifting Apart? The EU's Political Integration Capacity in Eastern Europe', *Journal of European Public Policy* 24/2 (2017).

7 O. P. Richmond, A. Björkdahl and S. Kappler, 'The Emerging EU Peacebuilding Framework: Confirming or Transcending Liberal Peacebuilding?', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 24/3 (2011).

and shared normative frameworks.⁸ Enlargement extended this community eastward after 1989, embedding post-communist states within a system that made conflict increasingly unlikely. Peace thus emerged not only institutionally but also through shared expectations shaped by interdependence.

However, this model was also fragile in ways that are often underestimated. Its effectiveness depended on preserving the strength of conditionality and the integrity of sequencing. If enlargement becomes contested or politicised, the density of interdependence may weaken, and with it the expectations of peaceful change. In such cases, the erosion of trust and compliance can undermine the very foundations of the security community.

Crucially, the classical model was temporally ordered. Transformation preceded membership. Enlargement was conditional, technocratic and merit-based. This sequencing ensured that candidate countries entered the Union only once they were sufficiently aligned with its institutional and normative framework. The temporal order was not merely procedural; it was constitutive of the EU's peace project. The credibility of enlargement as a peace-producing mechanism depended on preserving this sequence.

At the same time, enlargement also functioned as a broader strategy of stabilisation in conflict-prone regions. As highlighted in the literature on wartime enlargement, the EU historically used enlargement to promote peace in its neighbourhood, particularly during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. By offering a credible membership perspective, the EU encouraged reforms, conflict resolution and political consolidation—a process that can be understood as ‘pacification through incorporation’.⁹

This stabilisation logic reinforces the liberal-transformative model, but it also reveals the model's underlying assumptions: that transformation is achievable, that conditionality remains credible and that the EU itself maintains sufficient cohesion to

8 Adler and Barnett, *Security Communities*.

9 D. V. Kochenov and E. Basheska, ‘Ukraine and the EU Enlargement: What Is the Law and Which Is the Way Forward?’, *EU Law Live Weekend Edition* 126 (2022); Anghel and Džankić, ‘Wartime EU’.

deliver on its promises. When these conditions hold, enlargement produces peace through gradual convergence and institutional embedding.

However, this model also implies clear limits. If candidate countries are integrated prematurely—without full compliance, robust monitoring or completed transformation—the nature of governance itself changes. External governance begins to blur into internal governance, producing hybrid arrangements in which states are partially integrated but not fully aligned. In such situations, the EU's transformative power risks weakening, as the distinction between conditionality and membership becomes less clear.

This tension is particularly important in light of the EU's evolving structure. As argued in recent work on European integration, the EU has progressively moved from being a relatively exclusive 'club' to a more complex system of interdependence resembling a common-pool resource, in which access to its economic, regulatory and security goods is difficult to restrict.¹⁰ In such a system, the boundaries between insiders and outsiders become increasingly blurred, and the governance of access becomes more complex. Enlargement is therefore not only a process of inclusion, but also a mechanism for managing interdependence and ensuring the sustainability of shared resources.

Within the classical enlargement model, however, this complexity remained contained through sequencing. This sequencing ensured that new members could be integrated without destabilising governance structures. Enlargement was thus both a tool of peacebuilding and a mechanism for preserving institutional coherence.

Thus, enlargement as liberal-transformative peace rested on three key pillars: credible conditionality, sequential transformation and institutional embedding. Together, these elements produced a model of peace that was gradual, rules-based and internally generated. The durability of this model depended on maintaining the temporal order between reform and accession—a condition that is increasingly challenged in the post-2022 geopolitical context.

10 Anghel and Jones, *From Club to Commons*.

Synchronisation as a structural condition

However, the classical model of enlargement, based on sequential transformation and conditionality, presupposes a relatively stable temporal order between reform, accession and integration. This assumption becomes increasingly difficult to sustain under conditions of geopolitical acceleration.

This chapter introduces the concept of *synchronisation* to capture the temporal relationship between widening and deepening in EU enlargement. Synchronisation refers to the alignment between strategic inclusion (the expansion of the Union) and institutional consolidation (the adaptation of its governance capacity), such that enlargement does not outpace the Union's ability to govern effectively.

While the literature has extensively examined enlargement, conditionality and the widening–deepening nexus, it has not explicitly conceptualised the temporal condition under which enlargement remains peace-producing. Synchronisation fills this gap by shifting the focus from sequencing as a policy choice to timing as a structural constraint. Sequencing concerns the order in which reforms and accession take place. Synchronisation is concerned with whether multiple processes—candidate-country transformation, strategic integration and EU-level adaptation—remain aligned even when they no longer unfold in a strictly linear order.

The need for synchronisation derives from the conditions under which peace is sustained in integrated political communities. As the literature on security communities and European integration suggests, peace depends on dense institutionalisation, predictable governance and shared expectations of cooperation. Enlargement contributes to this process by extending these structures outward. However, if expansion proceeds faster than institutional adaptation, the mechanisms sustaining peace may weaken.

In the absence of synchronisation, three risks emerge. First, governance capacity may be overstretched, leading to decision-making inefficiencies and institutional congestion. Second, the credibility of conditionality may erode, weakening the

EU's transformative power and blurring the boundary between pre-accession and post-accession governance. Third, increased access to shared resources without corresponding governance reform may generate competition and strain within the Union, particularly as the EU increasingly resembles a system managing common-pool resources rather than a closed club.¹¹

Conversely, if deepening delays widening indefinitely, the EU risks undermining its strategic credibility and weakening its stabilising role in its neighbourhood. As recent research shows, enlargement is increasingly used as a geopolitical tool to signal commitment and deter external influence, even in the absence of immediate membership prospects.¹²

Synchronisation is therefore not a normative prescription or a reform agenda. It is an analytical concept that captures the structural balance required for enlargement to sustain peace under changing conditions. In classical enlargement, synchronisation was achieved through sequential conditionality: transformation preceded membership, ensuring that new members could be integrated without destabilising governance. In the current context, however, this sequence is disrupted. Wartime enlargement introduces temporal compression, as geopolitical urgency accelerates widening while institutional reform remains gradual and contested.

The result is asynchronous enlargement, a condition in which strategic inclusion, domestic transformation and EU-level consolidation proceed at different speeds, generating gaps between political commitments, institutional capacity and actual preparedness for membership. Synchronisation thus becomes the central challenge: not whether to widen or deepen, but how to align them temporally under conditions of geopolitical acceleration.

11 Anghel and Jones, *From Club to Commons*; T. Risse, *A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); T. Diez, S. Stetter and M. Albert, 'The European Union and Border Conflicts: The Transformative Power of Integration', *International Organization* 60/3 (2006).

12 Anghel and Džankić, 'Wartime EU'; Scicluna, 'Framing Enlargement After the Russian Invasion'.

Ukraine as a stress test of asynchronous enlargement

Ukraine provides the most immediate and revealing empirical illustration of asynchronous enlargement in practice. It does not simply exemplify the concept; it stress-tests its limits by exposing the tensions between strategic acceleration and institutional capacity.

First, acceleration is visible at the political entry point of enlargement. Ukraine's rapid transition from application to candidate status following the 2022 invasion reflects a break with the gradualism that characterised previous enlargement rounds. This acceleration was driven less by compliance with technical benchmarks than by political solidarity, strategic signalling and the need to deter further Russian aggression. Enlargement, in this instance, operated as an instrument of geopolitical anchoring rather than solely as a reward for completed transformation. This marks a clear departure from the classical sequencing of transformation-before-membership.¹³

Second, procedural continuity coexists with strategic acceleration, creating a layered and internally inconsistent process. Despite the political urgency, the formal accession framework remains intact: screening procedures, negotiation chapters and conditionality requirements continue to structure the process. This duality—rapid political inclusion combined with slow technical progression—illustrates the coexistence of two temporalities within enlargement: one driven by geopolitics, the other by institutional logic. Asynchronous enlargement emerges precisely from this misalignment.

Third, the institutional implications of Ukraine's potential accession are structurally transformative for the Union itself. Ukraine's size, economic structure and sectoral composition would significantly reshape key EU policies. Its agricultural sector alone would have major consequences for the Common Agricultural Policy, while its economic

13 Kochenov and Basheska, 'Ukraine and the EU Enlargement'; Anghel and Džankić, 'Wartime EU'.

profile would require substantial recalibration of cohesion policy and structural funds. More broadly, Ukraine's accession would intensify existing debates on decision-making efficiency, particularly regarding unanimity versus qualified majority voting. These pressures highlight a central feature of asynchronous enlargement: the scale of widening generates demands for deepening that cannot be immediately met.¹⁴

Fourth, a tension between normative and strategic logics becomes increasingly visible. On the one hand, the EU's transformative power depends on maintaining credible conditionality, particularly in areas such as rule of law, anti-corruption and institutional reform. On the other hand, the geopolitical imperative to anchor Ukraine within the European sphere creates pressure to accelerate integration, potentially ahead of full compliance. This produces a structural dilemma. If geopolitical urgency leads to the dilution of conditionality, the normative foundations of enlargement—and thus its capacity to produce transformative peace—are weakened. This risk is particularly visible in contexts in which formal compliance may coexist with informal or clientelist political practices, blurring the distinction between genuine transformation and instrumental adaptation.¹⁵ Conversely, if procedural rigidity delays integration excessively, the EU risks undermining its strategic objectives, weakening deterrence and eroding its credibility as a geopolitical actor.¹⁶

Fifth, and more broadly, Ukraine reveals that enlargement now operates under conditions of temporal compression. Strategic decisions are taken rapidly, while institutional adaptation remains incremental and politically contested. This temporal divergence is not accidental but structural: geopolitical crises accelerate inclusion, while governance reforms require consensus, negotiation and time. The result is a persistent gap between the pace of widening and the capacity for deepening.

Thus, Ukraine does not resolve the problem of asynchronous enlargement; it

14 Anghel and Jones, *From Club to Commons*.

15 T. Lavrelashvili, 'Party Membership in the EU's Waiting Room: Between Participation and Patronage', in P. Hefele and T. Muzergues (eds.), *Party Membership in Contemporary Europe* (Brussels: Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2025).

16 Kochenov and Basheska, 'Ukraine and the EU Enlargement'; Anghel and Jones, *From Club to Commons*.

exposes it. It demonstrates that enlargement can no longer rely on the classical model of sequential transformation, yet it also shows that abandoning this model entirely risks undermining both governance stability and normative credibility.

In this sense, Ukraine functions as a stress test of synchronisation. It highlights the structural necessity of aligning strategic inclusion with institutional consolidation, while simultaneously illustrating the difficulty of achieving such alignment under conditions of geopolitical urgency. The case of Ukraine, therefore, suggests that enlargement after 2022 is no longer defined primarily by its sequencing, but by its capacity—or failure—to manage temporal misalignment.

Enlargement, interdependence and governance sustainability

The EU increasingly governs dense interdependence across economic, regulatory and security domains. Enlargement, therefore, reshapes not only territorial scope but the architecture of governance through which this interdependence is organised and sustained.

Importantly, interdependence is no longer confined to formal membership. Candidate countries are already deeply embedded in European supply chains, labour markets and energy networks. As a result, the boundary between insiders and outsiders becomes increasingly blurred. Under such conditions, exclusion may itself become destabilising, as integration without institutional inclusion creates governance gaps, regulatory inconsistencies and political vulnerability. Enlargement thus functions as a mechanism for organising existing interdependence and ensuring coherence across interconnected systems.¹⁷

This dynamic generates a dual structural challenge. On the one hand, enlargement without institutional adaptation risks congestion and fragmentation. As access to shared resources—such as the single market, financial instruments and policy

17 Anghel and Jones, *From Club to Commons*; Lavrelashvili, 'How to Make EU Enlargement Work?'.

frameworks—expands, competition intensifies, and decision-making becomes more complex. Without corresponding reforms, governance capacity may be overstretched, undermining effectiveness and coherence.

On the other hand, institutional consolidation without strategic widening risks geopolitical vulnerability. If the EU strengthens its internal governance while delaying enlargement, it risks leaving highly interconnected neighbouring states outside its institutional framework. This can create zones of partial integration, where economic and regulatory ties exist without sufficient governance capacity, increasing exposure to external influence and instability.¹⁸

Under these conditions, peace is no longer produced solely through domestic transformation, but through the sustainable management of shared and overlapping spaces. Enlargement and deepening are therefore structurally interdependent: expansion increases the need for governance, while governance enables stable and credible expansion.

Synchronisation captures this interdependence between widening and deepening. It highlights that the central challenge is not to prioritise one over the other, but to align them so that interdependence remains both governable and stabilising over time.

Enlargement and the future of the European peace project

The temporal misalignment revealed by Ukraine is not only a procedural or institutional issue; it reflects deeper structural changes in the nature of the EU itself. As enlargement unfolds under conditions of acceleration, it increasingly interacts with a system characterised by dense and expanding interdependence.

The war in Ukraine does not mark the end of enlargement as a peace project. Rather, it transforms both its logic and its scope. Peace is no longer conceived

18 Anghel and Džankić, 'Wartime EU'; Anghel and Jones, *From Club to Commons*.

solely as the outcome of democratic transformation and legal convergence prior to accession. It increasingly encompasses three interrelated dimensions: democratic transformation, governance sustainability and geopolitical deterrence. Enlargement thus operates simultaneously as a normative, institutional and strategic instrument.

This transformation entails a shift in the temporal logic of enlargement. The classical model relied on a sequential order in which reform preceded membership and stabilisation followed integration. In the current context, this sequencing is disrupted.

Reform and strategic inclusion no longer unfold in linear succession; they interact and overlap. Candidate countries are partially integrated politically and strategically before completing the full process of institutional convergence. Enlargement becomes a process unfolding across multiple temporalities rather than a single, ordered trajectory.

This shift has profound implications for the European peace project. Peace is no longer produced exclusively through the gradual internalisation of EU norms, but also through the strategic anchoring of states within the European space under conditions of uncertainty and conflict. Enlargement, in this sense, contributes to stability not only by transforming states, but also by positioning them within a broader system of deterrence and interdependence.¹⁹

However, this hybridisation introduces new structural constraints. The sustainability of this redefined peace depends on the EU's ability to manage the relationship between acceleration and consolidation. If widening advances faster than internal institutional adaptation, the Union risks internal strain—manifested in governance inefficiencies, fiscal pressures and normative inconsistencies. Conversely, if deepening is used to delay or constrain enlargement, the EU risks undermining its strategic credibility and contributing to instability in its neighbourhood.

The European peace project is therefore no longer anchored solely in the principle

19 See M. A. Orenstein, 'The European Union's Transformation after Russia's Attack on Ukraine', *Journal of European Integration* 45/3 (2023); V. Della Sala, 'Ontological Security, Crisis and Political Myth: The Ukraine War and the European Union', *Journal of European Integration* 45/3 (2023);

of transformation-before-membership. It is increasingly anchored in the temporal management of acceleration—the ability to align processes that operate at different speeds: geopolitical decision-making, institutional reform and domestic transformation.

Conclusion: peace under acceleration

Enlargement after Ukraine represents not merely a policy adjustment but a conceptual shift in how the EU produces peace. The traditional model—based on sequential transformation and conditional integration—has not disappeared, but it no longer fully captures the dynamics of enlargement under conditions of geopolitical crisis.

Peace is redefined as the capacity to combine democratic transformation, credible geopolitical anchoring and sustainable governance within a single process of integration. Enlargement now operates simultaneously as a mechanism of internal transformation and as a tool of geopolitical stabilisation. This dual function reflects a broader shift in the EU's role, from a primarily normative power to an actor combining normative, institutional and strategic logics.

The case of Ukraine highlights that enlargement operates under conditions of temporal compression. Strategic urgency accelerates widening, while deepening proceeds incrementally and remains politically contested. This divergence produces a structural condition of asynchronous enlargement, in which the pace of expansion and the capacity for governance are no longer aligned.

The durability of enlargement as a peace project, therefore, depends on synchronisation—the alignment between expansion and institutional consolidation. Synchronisation is not a reform programme or a policy blueprint; it is a structural condition that determines whether enlargement can continue to generate stability under changing geopolitical conditions.

In this context, enlargement is no longer merely the EU's most successful foreign policy instrument. It has become the central arena in which the meaning, mechanisms and limits of European peace are being redefined. Rather than asking whether enlargement

produces peace, the more pressing question is how peace can be sustained under conditions of geopolitical acceleration, deepening interdependence and growing strategic uncertainty.

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About the author

Dr Teona Lavrelashvili is a political scientist and EU policy professional specialising in EU enlargement, the Eastern Neighbourhood, the South Caucasus and party politics. She is a Research Associate at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies and teaches at Sciences Po Strasbourg. She holds a PhD in Social Sciences from KU Leuven and has previously worked at the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Policy Centre.



Epilogue

Herman Van Rompuy

Like all concepts, the idea of peace has multiple layers. The most obvious is the difference between peace on the micro level and peace on the macro level.

Peace in the first sense is about contentment or, as it is in German, *Zufriedenheit*. 'Friede' means peace. Someone who is content is at peace with themselves. They have balance and harmony. Contentment is less than happiness, but it is far from unhappiness. When we talk about balance, one might rightly ask: a balance between what? Between realism and idealism, between life as it is and what it could be, between you and me. That balance does not come about by itself. It is the result of hard work and searching, of trial and error. Sometimes people set the bar low in order to be content. The higher the expectations, the greater the chance of failure and therefore of dissatisfaction. The less ambition, the quicker the satisfaction.

Harmony is not a gift but something you have to work for. Once you reach that point, you are more in tune with yourself and your environment. This can only be achieved by giving up part of your ego and being more other-centred or Other-centred. Experiences in nature or meditation can help with this. This sort of contentment is full of positive feelings and appeals to positive values.

In the Christian tradition, there may even be a sense of guilt when one fails to show sufficient attention to and love for others. Those who are too quick to say that they are not heroes or saints will not come any closer to fulfilling the ultimate task: 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.' To many, this task may sound almost inhuman, and it often is. That is why one should not give in to feelings of guilt too quickly. The reverse is also true: one should not give up too quickly on self-improvement or self-perfection.

There is a tendency to argue that if everyone achieved that degree of harmony on a micro level, peace would automatically follow on a macro level. The sum of micro balance would then be macro peace. The reverse is certainly true: in a world of pure egos, war is inevitable.

Reality is always multifaceted. If a part of society is filled with negative emotions

such as jealousy, anger, fear, revenge, violence, racism and 'enemy' thinking, it can sweep many along with it because negative feelings can sometimes have great appeal. This is certainly the case when the survival instinct is appealed to, when the impression is created that others are out to destroy you or want to take something or someone away from you. Even the 'good guys' can then be tempted to join in with this enemy mentality. Enemy thinking is often attractive. Dictators know this. That is why nationalism and racism are so popular. The feeling of being threatened is often accompanied by a kind of superiority complex. The other is not only 'hell' but can also be hurt or destroyed because it means nothing—or because the other is not even considered human. Hating the other or those who are different from ourselves is, then—from that perspective or emotion—simply normal. You do not even have to be ashamed of it or feel guilty about it. It can even flatter your vanity. You have someone beneath you: 'I am someone to the extent that some others are nothing.'

Those who say they want to make their country great actually want to make others small.

Needless to say, these negative emotions do not make anyone happy or satisfied. Perhaps we are not naturally good, but wallowing in evil is certainly not human.

War, as the opposite of peace, is often a macro event, sometimes even unrelated to what is happening in society.

Socio-economic factors can lead to war. The most famous example is the Great Depression, which began with the stock exchange crash of 1929. In two years the Nazi Party rose from being a marginal party to being the largest in Germany. Hitler was able to ride the wave of discontent and despair caused by the economic crisis and widespread unemployment. It is highly doubtful that more than a third of Germans voted for war in 1933. Voting for Hitler to combat unemployment was therefore not a choice for war. Once in power, the Nazis implemented their ideological programme, both in terms of their hatred of Jews and enacting revenge for Germany's defeat in 1918.

Of course, there was fertile ground for this in German society at the time, but one

should not underestimate what leaders can do with 'a mandate from the electorate'! Voters have only one vote to express their opinion on a wide range of issues. In my country, voting for a separatist party does not mean that you are a separatist. Therefore, there is room for the leadership to give its own interpretation to the votes, especially if there are no more elections after the takeover. Individuals can also play an important role. Most likely, without Hitler himself, there would have been no Second World War. A leader can break down all resistance, if there is any, through fear and terror. War is often decided only by the supreme leader or by a small group.

There is no determinism in history. It is not because there is mass unemployment, for example, that war must ensue. In countries other than Germany, the response to the same crisis was different. However, a leader can use nationalism to find support and even enthusiasm for going to war. This is often an aggressive form of nationalism, in the sense that it creates the impression that the country is under attack and must defend itself or even take action to prevent an invasion by attacking first. This pattern was seen in Germany in the 1930s and can be seen today in Russia. The elected president and parliament in Ukraine were portrayed by Putin and his clique as Nazis who had attacked the Soviet Union at the time. Here, too, the recipe is fear and self-preservation. The second war in Iraq was provoked by fears of the 'weapons of mass destruction' that Saddam Hussein was said to possess. The claim turned out to be completely false, but it was used to justify the war. The Islamic attacks of 9/11 and the fear that ensued in the US made everything plausible to many Americans, at least temporarily.

There is, therefore, an autonomous dynamic that can emanate from a leader and that comes from the top down. A leader is not necessarily a passive instrument of the so-called laws of history. His or her 'charisma' can play a decisive role. Another person may not be able to do the same. In a democracy, however, everything is temporary. Those in power are only tenants of power. Moreover, there are checks and balances in the system that counteract arbitrariness. 'Power tends to corrupt,

and absolute power corrupts absolutely,' said Lord Acton in 1887.¹ That is a constant in history! We are still aware of it today when we see what is happening in the US.

We have to admit that war is possible even with democracy in place. Let us not forget that democratic countries such as France, the Netherlands and the UK waged colonial wars, and sometimes even cruel wars. I have already mentioned the war in Iraq, and Vietnam can be added to that list. At the time they took place, many did not consider these conflicts to be wars because, after all, the territories on which war was waged 'belonged' to these colonial powers. It was their property that was in danger of being stolen from them. Such wars were conducted until 1974, when the new democracy in Portugal put an end to the colonial wars that had been waged by the fascist dictatorship.

Despite this important caveat, democracy provides an important brake on war. Preserving democracy is therefore an essential element in the struggle for peace.

After the Second World War and on the graves of tens of millions of people, six European countries, or what remained of them, decided 'never again'. It is never too late. The safest way to ensure the end of war was to introduce or secure democracy and stimulate interdependence via trade, so that waging war was against the economic and social interests of the citizens. It should not be forgotten that (West) Germany and Italy had hardly known democracy in their long history. From 1950 to 2009, a democratic union of democratic states called the European Union was built, step by step. The number of states has continued to grow—with the exception of Brexit—and there is now a waiting list of candidate countries. The Union has become increasingly deepened in the sense that integration continues, partly because the problems facing individual countries can no longer be solved at the national level.

The last area to be addressed is defence and security. Although the treaties say almost nothing about common defence, we are moving much more strongly towards

1 J. E. E. D. Acton, 'Letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, 5 April 1887', in L. Creighton (ed.), *Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton, D. D., Oxon. and Cam., Sometime Bishop of London*, vol. 1. (London: Longmans, Green, 1904).

a Defence Union. The reason for this cooperation and integration is not to become 'great again', but rather to solve problems. No one mourns the faded glory of what were once world powers. Even small countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium and Portugal were once great because of their colonial 'possessions'. National chauvinism and patriotism still exist, but not expansive nationalism and certainly not nostalgic nationalism. President Mitterrand was right when he said, 'Le nationalisme, c'est la guerre.'² Nationalism is synonymous with war. The process of interdependence and shared destiny has increased significantly. Support for the EU and the euro is now at its highest level in 20 years. Citizens know they need the EU. It is not Europhilia but the 'Europe of necessity'. I refer once again to defence and security. Crises naturally help to make the EU stronger.

My biggest concern is that the societies within each of the member states are in crisis due to sometimes rampant individualisation. This can cause a lot of negative emotions because an isolated individual is much more susceptible to fear, uncertainty and also manipulation. We must dare to analyse the reasons for this discontent more carefully than is usually the case.

I pose the following hypothetical question: would societal malaise disappear if there were zero immigration, zero pollution and zero budget deficit? These are the classic themes of the political agenda. Or would everything be better if 'woke' culture were no more? If the discontent were to persist—which I believe it would—then we must look further for the root causes, for the underlying reasons for the malaise. It could be that the causes are non-political. Politics is in everything, but thankfully, not everything is political.

The decline in social and family capital and the resulting increase in individualisation are making people lonelier and more isolated. Distrust of others is an inevitable consequence of this. This distrust can be directed at all those who are 'different' and

2 F. Mitterrand, 'Discours devant le Parlement européen', Strasbourg, 17 janvier 1995, in *Discours de M. François Mitterrand, Président de la République, sur le programme de la présidence française de l'Union européenne* (Paris: Présidence de la République, 1995). Texte disponible sur le site de la Présidence de la République française.

also at the so-called elites who have power or who pretend to have power.

Fearful people are more likely to turn to extremism. The result of this is party political fragmentation and volatility in voting behaviour. Our member states are becoming increasingly ungovernable. How can the Union stand strong if its member states are weak? It is possible when one has one's back against the wall and an abyss in front, but that is far from ideal! The unity of the EU is being tested by these internal developments. The remarkable thing is that the majority of citizens recognise the need for 'more Europe', often even more so than their elected leaders, who are sometimes still stuck in the patterns of the past. In this way, unity is more threatened by them than by the leaders of a few small countries who behave like little Napoleons. However, there must be no political implosion in Germany or France, because the situation would then become dangerous.

This analysis refers to the micro reasons for the dissatisfaction that is affecting the broader macro picture of the EU. Everything is in everything and vice versa. Nevertheless, there must be no leadership deficit. Even in difficult circumstances, political courage must serve the common good, including the European common good. As mentioned, individuals have a role to play in this. The reason for social unrest is not the EU, or it is only the cause to a very limited extent. As mentioned, the reason lies much deeper—deeper, even, than many people think.

A break-up of the Union would increase the chances of war between countries and would once again leave many open to occupation by third countries. Usually, people only realise the value of something when they lose it. This is true in personal life and also in the life of nations. The EU could break up without the citizens necessarily wanting it to. Czechoslovakia broke up without its citizens wanting it to: two leaders decided that. When citizens went to work the next day, they found themselves in a different country. The disappearance of the German Democratic Republic was desired by its inhabitants, but it still came as a surprise. What makes such a scenario unlikely is that the end of the EU would also mean the end of the eurozone, with the financial implosion that would follow, both globally and in Europe.

We must therefore work on several fronts to maintain peace and contentment. This is the responsibility of citizens, civil society and leaders alike. It is a matter of social cohesion, political democracy and a dynamic economy.

The situation is serious, but not hopeless. We are the authors of our own hope.

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About the author

Herman Van Rompuy is a Belgian Christian Democratic politician who served as prime minister of Belgium from 2008 to 2009 and became the first permanent president of the European Council from 2010 to 2014 following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. In Belgian politics he built his career in the Christian Democratic and Flemish party (CD&V), serving as party chairman and later as deputy prime minister and budget minister, where he was closely associated with fiscal consolidation efforts and institutional reforms. At the EU level his presidency of the European Council coincided with the eurozone sovereign debt crisis, during which he played a key role as a consensus-builder among heads of state or government, brokering major agreements on financial stability mechanisms and economic governance.

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Rue du Commerce 20

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