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Why Europe?



*An Integration History From
A(denauer) to Z(elensky)*

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Preface

‘Die Einheit Europas war ein Traum von wenigen. Sie wurde eine Hoffnung für viele. Sie ist heute eine Notwendigkeit für uns alle.’¹

Upon addressing the *Bundestag* on 15 December 1954, Konrad Adenauer could never have guessed that these words would sum up so on point, so early in its history, the mission of European integration. At the time, the failure of the European Defence Community (EDC) had soured the general mood. This misstep in the fledgling process of integration was seen as a triumph for the Soviet Union, the adversary of the Western allies during the Cold War. Nevertheless, the German Chancellor was deeply convinced that the unity of Europe was the path that indisputably had to be taken.

In present times, a new Cold War between the United States and China is taking shape. The same question emerges: which side will Europe take? We owe the possibility of this continent to determine its own path to more than 70 years of European integration. The necessity for such European unification is hardly disputed. Anno Domini 2023 even the most important European country, Germany, cannot fend for itself. Nor have the many decades dashed dreams and hope of unity. War-torn Ukraine, wanting nothing more than security and alignment with the process of European integration, is but one example.

‘Why Europe?’ presents the history of the process of European integration, from Adenauer to the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. It offers a unique approach to the development of the European Union (EU) by combining historical with thematic insights. Drawing from six questions that put main events, key figures, and defining moments of the past seventy years in the foreground, this book reveals the essence of European integration.

The original manuscript – published with the title ‘Waarom Europa?’ (edition 2021: ‘Kleine geschiedenis van een groot project’; edition 2022: ‘Van vredesproject tot oorlog in Oekraïne’) – has been improved, updated (until

1 March 2023), and translated from the Dutch original. To facilitate smooth reading, endnotes have only been used for literal citations and for source references. In addition, quotations in French and German are provided with a translation in footnote.

I remain most grateful to the Fund *involvEU* (www.kuleuven.be/involvEU) for this new edition. Without the inspiration of the founders, and the encouragement and financial support of the donors, this new version would never have seen the light of day. The proceeds of this book will be donated back to the Fund, so that other initiatives bringing citizens closer to the EU can also be supported.

Many thanks, too, to Uitgeverij LannooCampus, notably director Hilde Vanmechelen and acquisition editor Mitchell Pontzeele, for their enthusiasm and professional guidance on this new edition. The translation was excellently taken care of by Jakob Van Calster. Also thanks to Lien Jansen for her support in the editorial process.

This book aspires to appeal to a wide audience. It is therefore no coincidence that my co-author, Kamiel Vermeylen, is a journalist. He remains a first-class fellow traveller in this remarkable exercise in which a scholar practised a somewhat more journalistic writing style, and a journalist delved into academic scholarship. It is up to the reader to judge whether ultimately the combination is a successful one.

Why Europe? An Integration History from A(denauer) to Z(elensky) remains modest in the sense that it is “only” an introduction. Hopefully, however, it is one that inspires the reader to want to know and read more. At the same time, the goal is ambitious. Our overview is by definition incomplete. Yet our endeavour is to sketch a picture, as representative as possible of one of the most fascinating phenomena in recent political history: more than 70 years of integration on the European continent.

Steven Van Hecke

List of abbreviations

BLEU	Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CARD	Coordinated Annual Review on Defence
CDU	<i>Christlich Demokratische Union</i>
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
COREPER	<i>Comité des représentants permanents</i>
DG	Directorate-General
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
EBA	European Banking Authority
EATC	European Air Transport Command
ECB	European Central Bank
ECOFIN	Economic and Financial Affairs Council
ECDC	European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
ECTC	European Counter Terrorism Centre
EDA	European Defence Agency
EDC	European Defence Community
EDF	European Defence Fund
EDIDP	European Defence Industrial Development Programme
EEAS	European External Action Service
EEC	European Economic Community
EFSF	European Financial Stability Facility
EFSM	European Financial Stability Mechanism
EIB	European Investment Bank
EMI	European Monetary Institute
EMS	European Monetary System
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
EPC	European Political Cooperation
EPU	European Political Union
ESCB	European System of Central Banks
ESF	European Social Fund
ESM	European Stability Mechanism
EU	European Union

EURATOM	European Atomic Energy Community
EUROFOR	European Rapid Operational Force
EPP	European People's Party
ERT	European Roundtable of Industrialists
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDR	German Democratic Republic
IGC	Intergovernmental Conference
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRA	Irish Republican Army
MEP	Member of European Parliament
MFF	Multi-annual Financial Framework
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OEEC	Organisation for European Economic Cooperation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
OMT	Outright Monetary Transactions
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
PHARE	Poland and Hungary Assistance for the Restructuring of the Economy
PNR	Passenger Name Record
QMV	Qualified Majority Voting
SEA	Single European Act
SGP	Stability and Growth Pact
SIS	Schengen Information System
SSM	Single Supervisory Mechanism
SURE	Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency
TSCG	Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union
UK	United Kingdom
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
UN	United Nations
US	United States
VAT	Value Added Tax
WEU	Western European Union

Why Europe?

‘Without my relentless attitude, we would have doubtlessly been trampled underfoot.’²

During dinner on Monday evening of 9 December 1991, at the fairy-tale, baroque Dutch castle *Château Neercanne* on the Belgian-Dutch border, no one is in the mood to give in. Ruud Lubbers, whose turn it is to host, has just proposed a package deal regarding the old and new institutions of the European Union (EU). Included in the documents is a solution for the so-called seat issue, the question of which city will henceforth house the European Parliament: Brussels or Strasbourg.

Lubbers is at the top of his game as Dutch Prime Minister. At the European summit in Maastricht a definite step towards a federal Europe is about to be taken, with a single currency, European citizenship, and a common foreign and security policy. Convincing the Brits without making too many concessions is crucial. As treaty amendments require each Member State to concede alongside scoring points, Lubbers also hopes in the process to find a definitive arrangement for the seat of the European Parliament.

Wilfried Martens, known for his outspoken pro-European stance, is in the twilight of his days as Belgian Prime Minister. In his view, the Treaty of Maastricht falls short, seeing as there is no talk of an actual political union. All the same, as a fellow Christian democrat Martens wholeheartedly supports his Dutch colleague – except when it comes to the seat issue. In his memoirs he is adamant. With the anchoring of Brussels as European capital, the national interest of Belgium is at stake. This is why Martens is unwilling to blink, fully aware of the implied risks. ‘Diplomats doubted the persistence with which I kept to my position, and the effectiveness of my strategy. By aiming this high, Brussels stood to lose everything.’³

The acceptance of the Treaty of Maastricht, on which agreement is reached on 10 December 1991, was hard fought. Thirty years on, both proponents and opponents are nonetheless agreed that “Maastricht” has proven to be a landmark in the history of European integration. As regards the seat issue, two years after the Summit at the Maas, Martens’ successor, Jean-Luc Dehaene, came to an agreement that still applies today: both Brussels and Strasbourg are the seat of the European Parliament.⁴

One does not expect a Belgian Prime Minister to push Belgium’s national interest quite so vociferously alongside a strong plea for more European integration. Herein precisely lies the paradox: by unabatedly opting for one’s own gains of cooperation, the collective reaps the benefits, and progresses.

That the collective has progressed is beyond a shadow of a doubt. Barely five years after World War II ended, on 9 May 1950, in Paris's *Salon de l'Horloge*, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Robert Schuman, presented the birth certificate of what today is known as the EU. No one could at the time have imagined that 70 years later the current President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, would address directly elected representatives of the European Parliament with an annual State of the Union. This book's journey starts with a national minister who floats the idea of increasing cooperation between countries and this culminates in a political system in which the head of the European executive power provides chapter and verse to Members of the European Parliament from 27 different Member States. What kicked off as a limited international organisation in the 1950s has expanded into a system with federal, confederal, national and supranational characteristics, one in which nation states have evolved to Member States, potentially even to federated states.

This book explains the evolution of that process in two ways: thematically and chronologically. Each part sets out to explain the 'why' whilst simultaneously sketching the time period these events unravel in. In this way we combine our marvel at the successes and failures of the history of European integration, with a story that tells the most important events, the main protagonists, and key developments. After all, the current shape of the EU is strongly linked to decisions previously taken by various generations of policy makers. Those choices have seen the Union grow from merely a Western European initiative to a pan-European organisation. Moreover, the Union has grown to impact countless domains, exercising a great influence on the lives of its citizens. This result of years of ever-expanding integration did not come about without a struggle, and neither does the current endpoint lack controversy.

Before we address the 'why' question and the various episodes of the process of European integration, we suggest it is important to reflect on the history of the EU as a whole. How can we attempt to summarise the evolution of the Schuman Declaration in 1950 to the State of the Union of Ursula von der Leyen? Three "lenses" allow us to contemplate the previous 75 years in one fell swoop.

The first one involves the creation and the content of the **European treaties** – the legal foundation on which the European project was built and

still rests today. New treaties or amendments have continuously expanded the impact of the European institutions and policy making and at the same time expanded the powers of the EU. What started in 1952 with the Treaty of Paris – which gave birth to the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) – is today reflected in the debate as to which role the EU should play in the domain of public health. For in the absence of a treaty base, the EU institutions could not claim a leading role in the COVID crisis, to name but one example. Nonetheless, the Member States have transferred ever more decision-making power and ever more competences to the European level in successive treaty amendments. There is no example to date in which those competences or that decision-making power was returned to Member States. They can, however, in some cases decide not to participate in further steps towards deeper integration, with the eurozone or the Schengen zone as the most obvious examples. The close attention paid to the treaties as legal foundation for that European integration also serves as a reminder that the EU is, after all, an international organisation, and so not a state, despite quite a few of its features bearing a resemblance to one (e.g., a parliament, a currency, a flag).

A second viewpoint is the **geographic expansion**. Even more than the systematic broadening and deepening of the treaty basis, the size of the EU has become downright impressive. Schuman and his contemporaries had most likely never expected this success. From six relatively similar Member States in Western Europe, the EU has expanded into a pan-European organisation that encompasses almost an entire continent. By means of various enlargement rounds, the European integration process blossomed into an agora where countless heads of state and government leaders, ministers, diplomats, members of parliament and representatives of all kinds of interest groups continuously put their heads together. The war in Ukraine has once again launched enlargement to the top of the political agenda. The many countries that want to become candidate countries remind us how attractive the EU remains.

Finally, over and above the successive treaty amendments and enlargement rounds, there are the innumerable **moments of crises**, which to this day serve as fuel for the European integration process. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and uniform rules for the transport sector exist not so much because Lithuanian farmers have a soft spot for Portuguese truck drivers, but rather because the Member States concluded that they

could not adequately handle problems in various policy domains or because existing cooperation was insufficient. Integration is triggered by crises at a national level, usually in the form of failure or shortage. Driven by the promise, hope and calculation that cooperation produces more benefits than costs, Member States decide to pool their sovereignty and to intensify their cooperation. This has its advantages and disadvantages, and frequently the chosen path proves to be suboptimal. This is sometimes called 'falling forward', or in other words the process through which the EU tackles problems more efficiently along the way. It is not a thrilling tale, but it does illustrate that the Union undergoes a continuous learning process which slowly but surely progresses.

History is no logbook. Be it consciously or not, we always interpret and study events with contemporary perspectives that illuminate certain aspects and obscure others. This is also the case for the European integration process and the way in which we describe it in this book. Besides the treaties, the enlargement and the crises, there are many alternative lenses through which the history of the EU can be examined. Gender for one: despite the influential roles of amongst others Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (UK), and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the history of European integration is chronicled as a process driven primarily by men, starting with those not coincidentally known as the founding fathers. To a considerable extent, that is due to the prevailing cultural and socio-economic circumstances of the past. Although the first directly elected European Parliament appointed a woman (French politician and Auschwitz survivor Simone Veil) as its president, it took until 1989 for France and Greece to nominate a female European Commissioner. Thirty years later the Commission, composed of thirteen women and fourteen men, is headed by its first female president, Ursula von der Leyen.

An additional limitation is the Western European focus when detailing the history of European integration. This too is inextricably linked to reality. Of the six founding countries, five are entirely located in the west of the European continent. Even so, much of what happened in the east of Europe has also had an enormous impact on the formation of the European project as we currently know it. From the Hungarian uprising in 1956 and the civil war in Yugoslavia to the Russian annexation of the Crimea: to this day these developments reverberate into the heart of European capitals and

institutions. To a great extent, this is also true of the events that have been unfolding since 24 February 2022. The former colonies are also overlooked from time to time. At the same time as the founders of the EU grandly proclaimed “cooperation” as a salutary and necessary condition for peace, the countries and Member States involved were committing outright atrocities in many colonies. In contrast to what is often written in classical historiography, from the outset the European integration process was riddled with the colonial ambition to perpetuate European power with the largest possible landmass in the context of a bipolar world. For example, the original version of the Schuman Declaration – which is often “sanitised” – contains a passage in which it is explicitly stated that economic integration must contribute to the economic development of Africa. The colonies are hence attached to this new era of European politics. In any case, the EU still maintains “special relations” with many former colonies of Member States.

Finally, in this book we approach the history of European integration primarily from a top-down approach, namely on the basis of the protagonists and the most important Member States. This too is to a certain degree a reflection of reality. Especially in the early years, European integration was a prerogative reserved for a select few eminent figures with whom the ordinary man or woman in the street had little affinity. Until the Treaty of Maastricht, a so-called permissive consensus prevailed amongst the general population regarding the entanglement of the Member States and the emergence of supranational institutions. Citizens tacitly accepted, as it were, what was going on in a kingdom far, far away. As powers increased, however, and the impact of European policy grew, the European machine seeped ever further and ever more overtly into everyday life. For instance, European issues used to pass simply via the Minister of Foreign Affairs, or the State Secretary of European Affairs, as though Europe was concerned only with external policy. Nowadays almost every single politician at every single level of government encounters the EU, just like most companies, civil society organisations and interest groups. As a result, there is a growing realisation that this European integration emanates ever more political authority, which raises all kinds of questions regarding its legitimacy and accountability. Rightly so, it has to be said.

In the epilogue of this book we revisit this question, and we reflect upon the provisional final balance and the significance of the recent war in Ukraine. Before we get to that, we answer the following questions that lead us through the process of European integration, from A(denauer) to Z(elenskyy).⁵ Why is there no European army yet? Why is the internal market never completed? Why do the British want to set their own course? Why do we pay with the euro? Why do new countries keep joining? And why does every crisis seem to strengthen the EU?

1

Why is there no European army yet?

‘Savez-vous quelle est la base de notre politique? C’est la peur. La peur de vous, la peur de votre Gouvernement, la peur de votre politique.’⁶

Across from the Eiffel Tower, in the *Palais de Chaillot* right by the Seine, the third General Assembly of the United Nations is being held. The Belgian Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paul-Henri Spaak, addresses the delegation from Moscow with an unmistakable message. The socialist politician is sitting on the fence regarding the United States and the Soviet Union. Spaak is not eager to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and he is initially lacklustre regarding the economic help that the United States offers European countries, through the Marshall Plan. Nonetheless, Spaak comes to the conclusion that the contradictions between the United States and the Soviet Union are irreconcilable and that he is forced to choose sides. *'Savez-vous pourquoi nous avons peur? Nous avons peur parce que vous parlez souvent d'impérialisme. (...) Nous avons peur à cause de l'usage et surtout à cause de l'abus que vous faites du droit qui vous a été reconnu à San Francisco: le droit de veto. Nous avons peur parce que dans cette Assemblée, vous vous êtes fait les champions de la doctrine de la souveraineté nationale absolue. (...) La vérité, c'est que votre politique étrangère est aujourd'hui plus audacieuse et plus ambitieuse que la politique des Tsars eux-mêmes.'*⁷

The Cold War

Prior to the famous *'Nous avons peur'* speech by Spaak, there is a growing hope for more constructive international cooperation in the aftermath of World War II. With the United States and the Soviet Union as key players, the Allies had already decided how they would sculpt the post-war international order once they had defeated Nazism and the fascism of Germany, Italy, Japan and their allies. In October 1943 the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the United States, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom, and the Chinese ambassador to the Soviet Union gather in the Russian capital Moscow. The four of them recognise the need for a new international organisation, based on the principle of sovereign equality between peaceful states. An organisation that above all had learnt from the mistakes of the League of Nations, which had collapsed in the inter-war period due to internal strife. The stage is set.

After meetings in the Iranian capital Teheran and the American capital Washington D.C., the Allies lay the basis for an international organisation whose aim it is to bring about peace, security, cooperation and friendly