

A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, A CATALYST TO INTEGRATION OF EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the European Union (EU) as a catalyst to the integration of Europe. It discusses the geographical location of Europe. The origin, membership, aims, and organs of the EU came to focus. It assesses the EU as an agent of integration of Europe. The data were obtained from the primary and secondary sources. An oral interview constitutes the primary source. Books, Journals, Newspapers, Theses, Dissertations, etc., were used as secondary sources. It was found that attempts were made to establish associations with the mandate of the integration of Europe before the formation of the EU. It was also demonstrated that the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 renamed the European Community to the EU. It was also found that the custom union, common currency, and the European common market were part of the integration process. In conclusion, the EU has a lot of challenges confronting the realization of the mandate.

Keywords: Europe, Organs, Integration, Challenges.

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INTRODUCTION

Europe is a civilization, a territorial unit, and an idea. It is the heartland of the civilization that developed from the Judaic-Greco-Roman-Christian, tradition, which is conventionally known as Western civilization (Palmer and Perkins, 2007: 395-396). However, that civilization spread far beyond the confines, especially to the New World, Australia, and New Zealand. In many ways, it was dominant in Asia and Africa throughout most of the modern period of human history (Ibid).

Arnold noted that the civilizations of the non-Western world begun to challenge as well as to respond to the Europe centered civilization of the West (Arnold, 1953).

General Charles de Gaulle posited that Europe extends from the "Atlantic to the Urals" (Cited from Palmer and Perkins, 2007:396). It covers an area of approximately 4,000,000 square miles, more than half of which is occupied by European Russia.

Its population, including European Russia, is about 600,000,000 (Ibid). It is divided into 33 nation-states. It is necessary to add here that those with the largest population and also the greatest influence are the Soviet Union, West Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy.

It must be said that until the late nineteenth century, all the great powers were European. Their economic strength and cultural contributions, as well as their political and military might gave them a dominant position in the world (An Interview with Dr. Duyile, on April 16, 2023).

It was well established that on the eve of the World War II, Germany, Britain, France, and Russia were unquestionably great powers, and even Italy under Mussolini was making an impressive bid for similar recognition (Ibid, 399).

ORIGIN AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

EU was created after the Second World War and has developed since the E.U has gone through several waves of expansion in its scope, membership, and mission over the past 50 years (Sidjanski, 2000).

After the Second World War, it became a major challenge how to prevent the European continent from becoming the territory of wars again. In fact, Dante Aligheri was the first to voice the dream of the Europe in Unity and integration as a family of nations (Cited from Amittay, 1983:110). The project of peace of Abbe de St. Pierre, perpetual peace of Immanuel, Kant, Paneuropa of Count Richard Coudleuhade, Kalergi and the endeavors of Aristide Briand to keep the peace in Europe were all similar plans of bringing peace to Europe (Atature, 2008:20). Unfortunately, none of these projects was implemented because the motive of bringing peace on its own was not enough for achieving unity (Mattli, 1999:69).

Before the formation of the EU, various attempts were made to establish associations targeted toward uniting Europe as part of the integration process. The first of such was the Hanseatic League, which has similar features with the EU; established in 1356. This League collapsed in 1669 due to its clumsy structure, the rise of new rivals, and the impact of the Reformation and the emergence of the Westphalia state order (Atature, 2008:20).

Again, a number of unions which were mainly based on the unification of customs and trade were established. This included, the Bavaria-Württemberg Customs Union (1823-1833), the Middle German Commercial League (1821-1831), the German Customs Union (Zollverein, 1834), the Tax Union (1834-1854), the German Monetary Union (Deutscher; Munzverein, 1838), the Moldovan Wallachian Customs Union (1847), the Swiss confederation (1848), the German Monetary Convention (1857, the Scandinavian Monetary Union (1875) and the Benelux (1944) (Mattli, 1999:4-9).

In 1952, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was established, in which France and Germany were joined by Italy and by three smaller countries-Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg (together called the Benelux countries). These six states worked through the ECSC to reduce trade barriers in coal and steel and to coordinate their coal and steel policies. The ECSC also established a high authority that, to some extent, could bypass governments and deal directly with companies, labor unions, and individuals (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2010: 357-358) Britain did not join at this point.

In the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the same six states (France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg) created two new organizations. These were Euratom, the European Atomic Energy Community, established to coordinate nuclear power development and European Economic Community (EEC), the EEC. This was renamed the European Community (EC).

The Maastricht Treaty, signed in the Dutch City of Maastricht in 1992, renamed the EC as the EU and committed it to further progress in three main areas (Maastricht Treaty, 1992).

The three main areas were monetary union, a European police agency, and political and military integration. In the monetary union, the existing national currencies were abolished and replaced by a single European Currency, "euro" (Ibid). The European police agency responded to the new reality that borders were opening to immigrants, criminals, sex traffickers, and contraband. It also expanded the idea of citizenship so that a French citizen living in Germany can vote in local elections (Ibid). A third goal of Maastricht was the political and military integration. This commits European States to work toward a common foreign policy with a goal of eventually establishing a joint military force. The headquarters of the EU is in Brussels, Belgium.

MEMBERSHIP

The EU's success has attracted neighboring states that want to join. The EU has expanded from 15 members to 27 since

2004, with potentially far-reaching changes in how the EU operates (Jaoby, 2004).

Spain and Portugal were admitted in 1986 as the 11th and 12th members. In 1995, Austria, Sweden, and Finland joined the EU. Norway applied to join and was accepted, but its citizens voted down the idea in a referendum in 1994 (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 364). In the same vein, Switzerland's plan to join was halted by a popular referendum in the 1990s.

Suffice it to say that the EU's current expansion is guided by the 2000 Treaty of Nice, which came into effect in 2003 (Treaty of Nice, 2000). Ten new members joined in 2004, which were: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, and Cyprus. In 2007, Romania and Bulgaria joined, bringing the membership to 27.

THE AIMS OF THE EU

The aims of the EU are contained in Article 3 of the Lisbon Treaty. The aims of the EU within its borders are different from the aims of the EU within the wider world.

The aims of the EU within the wider world are:

- To uphold and promote its values and interests
- To contribute to peace and security and the sustainable development of the Earth
- To contribute to solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, the eradication of poverty, and the protection of human rights
- Strict observance of International Law (Lisbon Treaty, Article 3, 13th December, 2007).

While the aims of the EU within its borders are:

- To promote peace, its values and the well-being of its citizens
- To offer freedom, security, and justice without internal borders, while also taking appropriate measures at its external borders to regulate asylum and immigration and prevent and combat crime
- To establish an internal market
- To achieve sustainable development based on balanced economic growth, price stability, and a highly competitive market economy with full employment and social progress
- To protect and improve the quality of the environment

- To promote scientific and technological progress
- To combat, social exclusion and discrimination
- To promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, and the protection of the rights of the child
- To enhance economic, social, and territorial cohesion and solidarity among EU countries
- To respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity
- To establish an economic and monetary union whose currency is the euro (Article 3 of the Lisbon Treaty, December 13th, 2007)
- It may be necessary to examine the organs of the EU which represent the engine room or the catalyst of integration in Europe.

The main organs of EU are:

1. European Council: This is formerly known as the Council of Ministers. This council is made up of ministers, which could be foreign, economic, agriculture, and finance of each member state. The council has a rotating presidency with limited power (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2007:360). The Council of the EU must approve the policies of the European Commission and give it general direction (Kirchner, 1997).
2. European Commission: This Commission has 27 individual members, with one from each member state. The major function of this commission is to identify problems and suggest solutions to the Council of the EU. One of the members is selected by them as President of the Commission. The Commission has the task for the day-to-day EU operations. Again, the Commission reports to the Council of the EU and implements its policies.
3. European Parliament: It operates partly as a watchdog over the Commission, with some power to legislate. It has a function to approve the budget of the Commission, but cannot control it item by item. The parliament shares power with the Council under a "Co-decision Procedure" in such area as migration, employment, health, and consumer protection (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2007:360-361). The parliament serves as forum for debate on important issues. In 1999, the European Parliament established an Independent Commission which discovered waste and fraud in the Commission, resulting to the resignation of all 20 Commissioners. However, it must be noted that the European Parliament falls short of a true Legislature passing laws for all of Europe (Judge and David, 2003).
4. The economic and social committee: This committee's role is purely advisory. It lobbies the European Commission on issues important to it. Part of its function is to encourage discussion on continent-wide issues that affect particular industries or constituencies. It is a center or avenue for companies, labor unions, and interest groups to bargain transnationally.
5. The European Court of Justice: This is situated in Luxembourg, and the main function is to settle disputes on matters of Rome. This court can overrule national laws that conflict with EU law (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2007: 360-301).

THE EU AND THE INTEGRATION OF EUROPE

The EU is a project of integration and peace pursued by the European countries after the Second World War. The economic and political development in Europe in the years between 1945 and 2000 explain the process in which nation-states turned into a regional democratic state within the EU.

The EU integration movement started during the period when the international system was experiencing the cold war years did not change its characteristics (Atature, 2008:23). It continued the process on the grounds of formerly set principles and the motions brought by the continually formed new values and norms, even when the system with these two poles was shattered and the transition to a new system occurred (Ibid). The EU serves as an applied example of a regional integration plan to the world with the model of a multi-national integration that has gone on for a longtime (An Interview with Influence Osagie, on June 08, 2023).

The motive that started the process of integration in Europe was to prevent another war by controlling each other. Drawing conclusions from the bloody wars in their history, the European powers decide to act collectively. This willingness for collective action has been the critical point in the process of integration (Ibid, 25). Hence, the determination and ability of nation-states of the EU to come together will be described as the EU's willpower. Transforming this will-power into a process and making it permanent or constant is the EU's power of concert (Ibid). This concert and willpower are some of the most important characteristics of the EU.

As part of the integration process, the EU has created a common market. This made it possible to remove restrictions to trade within the member states and it is now possible for goods and people to move across borders without problems or obstacles. A common market means that, in addition to the customs union, member states allow labor and capital as well as goods to flow freely across borders (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2010:358). For example, a Belgian financier can invest in Germany on the same terms as a German investor. The Treaty of Rome committed the six states to create a custom union by 1969. A custom union creates free and open trade within its member states, bringing great economic benefits (The Treaty of Rome, 1957).

The EU set a target date of the end of 1992 for the creation of a true common market in Europe.

Another step taking by the EU to promote and enhance integration in Europe was the introduction of a single currency in Europe. A European currency, the "euro" was introduced to replace national currencies as mandated in the Maastricht process. The Maastricht Treaty signed in the Dutch City of Maastricht in 1992, renamed the EC as the EU and committed it to further progress in three main areas. One of such areas was monetary union, in which the existing national currencies were abolished and replaced by a single European currency (Maastricht Treaty, 1992). The euro came into full circulation in 2002, and the national currencies ceased to exist.

It must be noted that Britain, Denmark, and Sweden retained their national currencies. The creation of a European currency is the largest financial overhaul ever attempted in history.

Another dimension to integration by the EU was to work toward equalizing Europe's economies. For instance, an attempt was made to reduce the disparity between the rich and poor E.U states. As a first step, the Maastricht Treaty increased the EU budget by \$25 billion annually to provide economic assistance to the poorer countries (Ibid). The richer EU countries pay the cost for this aid in carrying the poor countries as free riders on the collective good of EU integration.

Furthermore, important is the revision of the Treaty of Rome through the 1985 Single European Act. This Act began a new phase of accelerated integration (An Interview with Hon. Igunbor on August 20, 2023). The Single European Act gave a new push to the creation of a European Bank in Frankfurt, Germany.

As long as the economies of the EU members were tied to separate states with separate central banks, efforts to maintain fixed exchange rates were difficult; hence, the necessity for a European Central Bank to serve as a coordinating unit. The European Central Bank took over the functions of states Central Banks (Chang *et al.*, 2000).

CHALLENGES OF THE EU

First, some citizens of Europe began to react against the loss of national identity and sovereignty implicit in the Maastricht (Cowles *et al.*, 2001). As an amendment to the Treaty of Rome, the Maastricht had to be ratified by all the members (The Maastricht Treaty, 1992). The ratification process stirred up strong public against closer EU in several countries.

The Second Monetary Union is difficult for both economic and political reasons. In participating states, fundamental economic and financial conditions must be equalized (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2010:363). One state cannot stimulate its economy with a low interest rate because of a recession, while another cools inflation with high interest rates because of high economic growth (Ibid).

The ECSC succeeded in 1952 in technical co-operation, but political and military co-operation proved much more difficult. In line with the vision of a United Europe, the six ECSC States signed a Second treaty in 1952 to create a European Defense Community (ECSC Treaty of 1952). This was intended toward integrating Europe's military forces under one budget and command. While the French parliament failed to ratify the treaty, Britain refused to join such a force.

Again, the European Commission, an organ of the EU lacks formal autonomy except for the day-to-day EU operations. Another challenge is having a European parliament that falls short of a true Legislature passing laws for all of Europe (Kirchner, 1997).

Again, political and military integration have created a serious challenge (Duke, 2003). The transition to supranationalism has not yet been accomplished in the realms of sovereignty, foreign, and military policy.

Another challenge to the EU is the admission of Turkey into the Union. For many years now, Turkey applied for membership of the Union, but its application has been stalled. It has generated heated debate among members; some argued against the backdrop of poverty. Others noted that it would be the only non-Christian member. Yet others posit that it has not settled past conflicts with current members of Cyprus and Greece. Whatever angle we look at it, it is still a challenge to the EU.

Atature noted that the EU does not possess the military power required for the formulation and implementation of common foreign and security policies (Atature, 2008:18). As a result, the impact of the EU on the international order remains limited.

Again, the EU still has the challenge in the processes of decision-making and identity-formation. The union has the problems of ethnic and religious discrimination and migration policy-Atature argued that the EU is aware of the fact that it cannot form an international order with its present armed strength, structure, and size (Ibid, 26).

CONCLUSION

Europe is the heartland of the civilization that developed from the Judaic-Greco-Roman Christian tradition, which is conventionally known as Western civilization. Until the late 19th century, all the great powers were European.

The EU was created after the Second World War and has developed since. The EU has gone through several waves of expansion in its scope, membership, and mission over the past 50 years.

After the Second World War, it became a major challenge how to prevent the European continent from becoming the territory of wars again. Before the establishment of the EU, various attempts were made to establish associations targeted toward uniting Europe as part of the integration process.

In the Treaty of Rome in 1952, the ECSC was established, in which France and Germany were joined by Italy and by three smaller countries, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. In the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the six states created two new organizations-Euratom and the European Economic community which was later renamed the EC.

The Maastricht Treaty signed in the Dutch City of Maastricht in 1992, renamed the EC as the EU. The headquarters of the EU is Brussels, Belgium. The present membership is 27.

The main mandate of the EU is the integration of Europe to prevent another war. It has succeeded in this direction through the establishment of a common market, custom union, introduction of a single currency, "euro", etc. However, the EU is facing a lot of challenges.

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