



A Critical Assessment of the European Union: A Catalyst for the Integration of Europe

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ABSTRACT

The article assesses the European Union as a catalyst for the integration of Europe. It discusses the geographical location of Europe. The origin, membership, aims and organs of the EU came to focus. It examines the EU as an agent of integration of Europe. The data was obtained from primary and secondary sources. 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 integration of Europe before the formation of the EU. It was also demonstrated that the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 changed the name of the EC to 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 European Union has a lot of challenges when confronted with the realization of the mandate.

Keywords: Europe, Organs, Integration, Challenges

I. Introduction

Europe is a civilisation, a territorial entity and an idea. It is the stronghold of the civilisation that developed from the Judaic-Greco-Roman-Christian belief, which is conventionally known as Western Civilisation (Palmer and Perkins, 2007: 395-396). However, that civilisation 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 civilisation of the west. (Arnold, 1953).

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

Her 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 end of the 19th century, all the super powers were European. Their economic might and cultural inputs as well as their political and military power gave them a commanding position in the world (An Interview with Dr. Duyile, on 16-4-2023).

It was well established that on the eve of the World War II, Germany, Britain, France, Russia were undoubtedly super powers and also Italy, under Mussolini, was making a great effort for related acknowledgment.(Ibid, 399).

Origin and Membership of European Union

The EU was founded after the World War II and has evolved as the E.U has lived through many spate of enlargement in its spread, membership and quest in the last 50 years. (Sidjansk, 2000).



After WW II, the real test was how to stop the European continent from becoming a war zone. In reality, Dante Alighieri was the earliest express Europe's vision of oneness and consolidation as a committee of nations (Cited from Amittay, 1983:110). Abbe de St. Pierre's project, Immanuel Kant's perpetual peace, Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi's Paneuropa and Aristide Briand's efforts to maintain peace in Europe were all the same plans to bring peace to Europe (Atature, 2008:20). Regrettably, not one of these plans were executed because the aim to bring peace alone was inadequate to realize unity (Mattli, 1999:69).

Before the formation of the EU, various attempts were made to establish associations targeted towards uniting Europe as part of the integration process. The first of such was the Hanseatic League, which has similar features to the European Union, established in 1356. This League broke down in 1669 because of its cumbersome structure, the emergence of new competitors and the effects of the Reformation and the emergence of the Westphalia state order (Atature, 2008:20).

Again, several unions, which were based on unification of customs and trade, were founded. They included, the Bavaria-Württemberg Customs Union (1823-33), the Middle German Commercial League (1821-31), the German Customs Union (Zollverein, 1834), the Tax Union (1834-54), the German Monetary Union (Deutscher, Munzverein, 1838), the Moldavian 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 founded, which, in addition to France and Germany, also included three smaller countries: Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg (together called the Benelux countries). These six states worked through the ECSC to minimize trade blockades in the coal and steel sector and to dovetail their coal and steel policies. The ECSC also formed a High Authority that could sort of bypass governments and work directly with businesses, labour unions and individuals (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2010: 357-358) Britain did not join at this point.

In the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the six states (France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) formed two new organisations. These were Euratom, the European Atomic Energy Community, established to coordinate nuclear power

development, and the European Economic Community (EEC). This was renamed the European Community (EC).

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

The three major areas were the monetary union, a European police agency and political and military integration. In the monetary union, the existing national currencies were stopped and substituted by a single European currency, the 'euro'. (Ibid). The European police agency responded to the new reality that borders were open to migrants, criminals, sex traffickers and smugglers. It also expanded the idea of citizenship allowing a French citizen living in Germany to vote in local elections (Ibid). A third goal of Maastricht was political and military integration. This obliges the European States to work towards a common foreign policy with the aim of building a combined armed force. The headquarter of the EU is Brussels, Belgium.

Membership

The EU's achievement captivated neighbouring states wanting to join. The EU grew from 15 to 27 members since 2004, bringing widespread changes to its functioning (Jacoby, 2004).

Spain and Portugal were let in as the 11th and 12th members in 1986. In 1995, Austria, Sweden and Finland became members of the EU. Norway applied and was accepted to become a member, but its citizens rejected the idea in a referendum in 1994 (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 364). Likewise, Switzerland's plan to become a member was stopped by a referendum in the 1990s.

The present expansion of the EU is governed by the Nice Treaty of 2000, which became a force in 2003 (Treaty of Nice). In 2004, ten new members were added: Poland, The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Cyprus. In 2007, Romania and Bulgaria joined, increasing the number of members to 27.

The Aims of the European Union

The aims of the EU are contained in Article 3 of the Lisbon Treaty. The aims of the EU within its borders differ 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, 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 European Union 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 and 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 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, 13th December, 2007).

- It may be necessary to examine the organs of the European Union which represent the engine room or the catalyst of integration in Europe.

1. **European Council:** It was previously known as the Council of Ministers. This council consists of ministers, which could be foreign, economic, agriculture, finance of each member state. The Council has a rotating presidency with limited powers (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2007:360). The council of the EU must consent to the policies of the European Commission and give it a general direction (Kirchner, 2003).

2. **European Commission:** The Commission consists of 27 individual members, one from each member state. The main task of this commission is to identify problems and propose solutions to the council of the EU. One of the members is selected by them as President of the Commission. The Commission is tasked with managing the daily operations of the EU. Again, the Commission reports to the Council of the EU and implements its policies.

3. **European Parliament:** It functions partly as a supervisory authority of the Commission with certain legislative powers. It has the task of approving Commission's budget, but it can not control it point by point. The Parliament shares power with the Council under a "co-decision procedure" in areas such areas as migration, employment, health and consumer protection (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2007:360-361). Parliament serves as a forum for debate on important issues. In 1999, the European Parliament set up an Independent Commission, which discovered waste and fraud in the Commission leading to the resignation of all 20 commissioners.

However, it should be noted that the European Parliament is not a true legislature that makes laws for the whole of Europe (Judge and David, 2002).

4. **The Economic and Social Committee:** The function of this committee is purely advisory. He lobbies the European Commission on issues relevant to him. Part of its function is to stimulate debate on continental issues affecting particular industries or constituencies. It is a center or avenue for companies, labour unions and interest groups to negotiate at a transnational level.



5. The European Court of Justice: This is based in Luxembourg and its main task is to resolve disputes regarding Rome matters. This court can annul national laws that conflict with EU law (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2007: 360-301).

The European Union and the Integration of Europe

The EU is an integration and peace project pursued by European countries after the Second World War. The economic and political development in Europe between 1945-2000 explains the process in which nation states became regional democratic state within the EU

The integration movement of the EU, which began in the period in which the international system was in the years of the cold war, did not change its characteristics (Atature, 2008: 23). He continued the process on the basis of previously set standards and the impulses generated by the continuous formation of new values and norms, even when the system of these two poles collapsed and the change to a new system took place. (Ibid). The EU serves as an applied example of a regional integration plan for the world with the long standing multi-national integration model (An Interview with Influence Osagie, on 8-6-2023).

The reason for starting the integration process in Europe was to avoid another war through mutual control. The European powers drew the conclusions from the bloody wars of their history, and decided to act collectively. This will to collective action was the crucial point in the integration process (Ibid, 25). Therefore, the determination and ability of the EU nation states to come together is referred to EU willpower. Converting this willpower into a process and making it permanent or constant is the EU's concerted power (Ibid). This concerted effort and willpower are among the most important characteristics of the EU

As part of the integration process, the EU has created a common market. This meant that trade restrictions within member states could be lifted and goods and people can now cross borders without any problems. A common market means that, in addition to the customs union, member states allow the free flow of labor and capital and goods across border (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2010: 358). For example, a Belgian financier can invest in Germany under the same conditions as a German investor. The Treaty of Rome obliged the six states to create a customs union by

1969. A customs union creates free and open trade within member states and brings great economic benefits (Treaty of Rome, 1957).

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

Another step taken by the European Union to promote and improve integration in Europe was the introduction of a single currency in Europe. A European currency, the 'Euro' was introduced to replace the national currencies envisaged by the Maastricht process. The Maastricht Treaty, signed in the Dutch City of Maastricht in 1992, changed the EC's name to EU and committed it to further progress in three main areas. One such area was monetary union in which the existing national currencies were abolished and replaced by a single European currency (Maastricht Treaty, 1992). In 2002, the Euro was finally put into circulation and national currencies no longer existed.

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

Another dimension to EU integration was to balance the European economies. For instance, attempts were made to reduce the inequality between rich and the poor EU states. As a first step, the Maastricht Treaty increased the EU budget by \$25 billion per year to provide economic aid to the poorest countries (Ibid). The richest countries in the EU bear the costs of this aid by making the poor countries free riders on the common good of EU integration.

The revision of the Treaty of Rome through the Single European Act of 1985 is also important. This Act initiated a new phase of accelerated integration (An Interview with Hon. Efofa Igunbor on 20-08-2023). The Single European Act gave a new impetus to the establishment of a European Bank in Frankfurt, Germany.

While the economies of the EU member state were linked to separate states with separate central banks, efforts to maintain fixed exchange rates were difficult, requiring the European Central Bank to act as a coordinating entity. The European Central Bank took over the functions of state central banks (Changi, 2004).



Challenges of the European Union

First, some European citizens began to react against the loss of national identity and sovereignty associated with Maastricht (Cowles, 2001). As an amendment to the Treaty of Rome, Maastricht had to be ratified by all the members (Treaty of Maastricht, 1992). The ratification sparked strong opposition between public opinion and European Union rapprochement in several countries.

The second Monetary Union is difficult for both economic and political reasons. In participating states, basic economic and financial conditions must be equalized (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2010: 363). One state cannot stimulate its economy with low interest rates due to a recession, while another state coals inflates with high interest rates due to high economic growth (Ibid).

The European coal and steel community achieved successful technical cooperation in 1952, but political and military cooperation proved far more difficult. In line with the vision of a united Europe, the six ECSC States signed a second treaty in 1952 establishing a European Defense Community (ECSC Treaty of 1952). The aim was to integrate the European armed forces under the same budget and command. Although the French parliament did not ratify the treaty, Britain refused to join this force.

Once again, the European Commission, an organ of the European Union, apart from the day-to-day operations of the EU, lacks formal autonomy. Another challenge is having a European parliament that falls short of a true legislature that passes laws for the whole of Europe (Kirchner, 2003).

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

Another challenge for the EU is the admission of Turkey into the Union. For many years now, Turkey applied for membership with the Union, but its application has been stalled. It sparked heated debate among members, some of whom argued in the context of poverty. Others pointed out that it would be the only non-Christian member. However, others claim that it has not resolved past conflicts with current members of Cyprus and Greece. No matter which angle we look at it from, it remains a challenge for the European Union.

Atature pointed out that the EU does not have the military power necessary to formulate and implement a common foreign and and security policy (Atature, 2008: 18). Therefore, the EU's influence on international order remains limited.

Once again, the EU still faces a challenge in decision making and identity-formation processes. The Union has problems with ethnic and religious discrimination and immigration policy. Atature argued that the EU is aware of the reality that it can not form an international order with its current armed forces, structure and size (Ibid., 26).

II. Conclusion

Europe is the heart of civilisation that developed from the Judaic-Greco-Roman Christian tradition and is commonly known as Western Civilisation. Until the end of the 19th century, all the great powers were European.

The European Union was founded after the Second World War and has evolved since then. The EU has undergone several waves of expansion in terms of its scope, membership and mission over the last 50 years.

After the Second World War, it became a major challenge how to prevent the European continent from becoming a war zone again. Before the founding of the European Union, there were several attempts to create associations aimed at unifying Europe as part of the integration process.

The 1952 Treaty of Rome create the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), with France and Germany joining Italy and three smaller countries: Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. In the 1957 Treaty of Rome, six states created two new organizations: Euratom and the European Economic Community, which was later renamed the European Community (EC).

The Maastricht Treaty signed in the Dutch city of Maastricht in 1992 changed the name of the EC to the European Union. The headquarter of EU is Brussels, Belgium. It currently has 27 members.

The EU's main mandate is to integrate Europe to prevent another war. It has achieved this through the creation of a common market, a customs union, the introduction of a single currency, 'the euro', etc. However, the European Union faces many challenges.



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