

Introduction

When the history of the 20th century is written, the process of European integration will figure as a major feature in the development of Western Europe. It will not be because it prevented a future war – the looming presence of the Soviet Union was sufficient to stop any local adventure in that direction – but because it anchored an era of unparalleled prosperity and because it lay the foundation for the democratic transformation of East Central Europe once the Cold War was over. The term ‘European integration’ has been used to describe these events, as though there was a single unbroken trail of successes, and the occasional setback, leading to the European Union of today. And since there appears to be a sequence to these developments, there is always a ‘process’ to explain them. History is rarely so tidy.

Alongside the early treaties founding the European Coal and Steel Community (1951) and the European Economic Communities (1957) there existed other regional experiments at integration (in the sense of growing together, or becoming more interdependent), including the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (1948) and the European Free Trade Association (1960), which have tended to fade from view, as well as the ill-fated attempt by the original six Coal and Steel Community members to create a European defence community and a European political community (1952-1955).

History is written in different ways and in different waves at different times. Almost before the dust has settled on a particular episode of the past a rash of publications appears that capture, analyse, explain and place in context what has just happened, very often before the outcome is known and the full impact appreciated. These are mostly based on the open record and after the initial

splash the output gradually eddies until public interest wanes altogether. This is what we may call 'contemporaneous history'. There is nothing wrong with it, and when spiced up with a dollop of theory, many have become classics of their kind.

A second wave then begins to emerge as the participants in the events, or their biographers or ghost-writers, start to place themselves into the flow of history to demonstrate how their presence in the story may have nudged the tide in this direction or that. This is a history from the participant's perspective – which is exactly what we want from an ego-document – but we must remember that it is not always the perspective that the historian would necessarily choose. The eyewitness' perspectives will have identified what, for them, were the important events. They will have seen them from their own position as a participant, and they will have placed other actors accordingly. And they will have also rationalised, or perhaps even justified, the positions that they took at the time.

The third wave begins as the documentation that informed the decision-making process begins to emerge into the public domain. This moment varies from country to country, but in Western Europe the documents are made available to the public most commonly after thirty years have passed. Governments judge that sufficient time has elapsed to nullify any dangers to national security, and potential damage to the reputation and careers of the participants has been diminished. Unfortunately, by then it also leaves precious little time for historians to match the written record with the testimony of surviving eyewitnesses. The records most eagerly sought by historians fall into three main categories: records of international negotiations, diplomatic records from embassies abroad, and documentation relating to domestic decision-making. And from these perspectives, they do indeed shed new light on questions from the past. However, they do not tell the whole story. The documents, too, were written from a particular perspective and if their judgements were wrong at the time, they are likely to be wrong today. Moreover, the documents do not tell a story; they help answer questions and these questions are framed from the historians' own perspectives.

After a flurry of activity as historians access the newly released archive record, the volume of published research again wanes. Occasionally interest is reignited as the approach of a new anniversary rekindles interest (and, if you are lucky, also provides funding) or if a particular 'crisis' prompts some historical reflection. For the rest, it is slowly assimilated into the textbook accounts of events.

The essays in this volume were written at different stages over the past thirty years, mostly coinciding with the opening of the archival record of the events described. Thus, in the 1980s, historians were becoming able to access the records related to the founding treaties establishing the forerunners to the present-day European Union. They also cover the history of other integration experiments dating from the time. Most appeared in edited volumes bringing together different perspectives on historical topics. It was in this way that the history of European integration was driven forward. In those days, to have published in the established journals would have been tantamount to ‘losing’ the article for the relevant audience. However, as the internet has opened up journal articles to researchers and has facilitated the searching of article databases, it is the book chapters that are difficult to find and to locate. For this reason, I appreciate the initiative of Leiden University Press in bringing some of them together in this volume.

We decided against ‘upgrading’ the annotations since that would be tantamount to falsifying the writing of history. Instead, at the end of each contribution there will be a brief indication of where and why it was written (and published) followed by a short discussion of the most important literature to have appeared since.

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