

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-11874-4 - The Politics of the European Union: Second Edition  
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Excerpt  
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# PART I

## Setting the scene: origins, analytical perspectives and institutions

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# 1 The historical development of the EU

## ■ Introduction

To most European citizens the Ninth of May will be a day just like any other. In Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg, however, this is different. In these cities a sizeable number of people work for one of the institutions and organizations of the European Union (EU). If we follow the official historiography of the EU, their jobs found their origin in a press conference held sixty-five years ago by the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Robert Schuman. On 9 May 1950 he proposed a plan that laid the foundation for today's European Union by proposing to set up a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).

In 1985 the leaders of the member states of the EU decided that it would be good to celebrate this day as Europe Day. But most citizens will not notice this. Maybe this is not surprising given the fact that the day marks a rather obscure event in history. After all, commemorating a press conference is quite different from celebrating a rebellion (like the USA's Fourth of July) or a revolution (such as France's Quatorze Juillet).

Despite its humble origins, the EU has in the meantime developed into a political system that seriously impacts the lives of these same citizens. Within a timespan of only sixty years it has established itself as a unique form of political cooperation comprising twenty-eight member states and 500 million inhabitants, with a combined income that is the world's largest. No wonder

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some observers have characterized the EU as a superpower, albeit a soft one: instead of conquering new territory by force as the old superpowers used to do, the EU has been able to expand because countries have been very eager to join and share in the assumed benefits of membership.

In this book we outline the current politics of the EU, but a brief overview of the way this organization has evolved is essential to better understand how it operates today. After all, many of today's political decisions will end up as historic events in tomorrow's books. A closer examination of the most significant political events that occurred in the EU's history gives us a first insight in the nature of EU politics today. We do this by examining the following questions:

- What was the historical background to several initiatives for international cooperation after the Second World War?
- What made the European Coal and Steel Community so important for European integration?
- What have been the major developments in the process of European integration when looking at the evolution of its policies, institutions and membership over the decades?
- What does the history of European integration teach us about studying EU politics today?

After reading this chapter you will have learned that the process of bringing the European countries together was a long and winding road with many fits and starts. Periods of rapid change and innovation have alternated with long stretches of gridlock and stalemate. The process was often erratic because of fundamentally different views on the nature, pace and scope of integration. While the term 'European Union' suggests that we are dealing with an organization that was swiftly put in place on the basis of a solid design, we are in fact looking at a patchwork that has been stitched together in a step-by-step fashion over the course of six decades.

### ■ The origins of European integration

The institutional roots of the European Union lie in the years following the Second World War. Europe was shattered, and not for the first time. European history had been marked by an almost infinite sequence of conflicts, wars and rebellions, fuelled by religious strife, imperial ambitions and nationalistic sentiments. Notable philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham and Immanuel Kant had already concerned themselves with this problem and come up with proposals for some type of a federation of states in order to guarantee peace and avoid war. None of these ever materialized, however.

The aftermath of the Second World War provided unusually fertile ground for new ideas for international cooperation. The war took the lives of approximately 40 million civilians and 20 million soldiers, while those that survived were faced with destruction and despair. In a speech at the University of Zürich

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in 1946 Winston Churchill – who had been Britain’s prime minister during the war – sketched the sense of despair: ‘Over wide areas a vast quivering mass of tormented, hungry, care-worn and bewildered human beings gape at the ruins of their cities and their homes and scan the dark horizons for the approach of some new peril, tyranny or terror.’ Churchill’s speech became historic because he proposed to ‘recreate the European family in a regional structure called, it may be, the United States of Europe’. He urged France and Germany, the two arch-enemies, to take the lead in setting up such a federation.

Fears about the future were fuelled in particular by the geopolitical map of the new Europe. Following the post-war settlement, Europe was divided into two spheres of influence. An Eastern zone was dominated by the communist Soviet Union, with countries such as Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria and the eastern part of Germany. The Western part of Europe consisted of liberal democracies that were strongly supported and protected by the USA. Fears that the Soviet Union might try to expand its sphere of influence westward necessitated a swift rebuilding of Europe. Hence, the USA was supportive of many of the initiatives that were launched to foster cooperation (see Briefing 1.1). Three different types of organization emerged:

- Military cooperation found its beginnings in initiatives for a common defence such as the Western European Union (WEU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).
- Political cooperation emerged via organizations such as the Council of Europe.
- Economic cooperation took root via the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), the Benelux and the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).

The legacy of the two world wars made any form of cooperation involving France and Germany extremely difficult. The most delicate and pressing issue was the German question. Germany’s size and its economic potential necessitated that it recover as soon as possible. Germany’s large coal resources in the Ruhr area were pivotal for Europe’s recovery and for the French steel industry in particular. At the same time many feared that a resurgence of Germany could make the country belligerent again and cause new military conflict.

Fuelled by the fear of communism the USA decided that Germany needed to be integrated in the Western bloc as soon as possible. In April 1949 the western part of Germany regained its independence and was transformed into the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). French fears were dealt with by putting Germany’s coal industry under the supervision of the International Authority for the Ruhr (IAR) which would manage coal supplies from the Ruhr region. The IAR was in charge of determining the minimum amount of coal, coke and steel Germany should make available for export. Both politically and economically the IAR was not a success: the Germans still felt occupied and the method of rationing coal was not efficient. The Americans therefore urged the French to devise another scheme. It was Jean Monnet, Commissioner-General of the

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Briefing 1.1

*Related international organizations and their current status*

The **Western European Union (WEU)** was founded through the Brussels Treaty in 1948 by the United Kingdom, Belgium, France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. It was set up to provide for common defence in case of an attack on any of its members and prepared the ground for the foundation of NATO (see below). The activities of the WEU have now been incorporated in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy and the Treaty was terminated in 2011.

The **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** is a military intergovernmental alliance through which each of the members pledges support to the other members in the event they are attacked. It found its origin in a similarly named Treaty signed in 1949 by twelve Western countries including the USA, Canada, United Kingdom, France and Italy. NATO currently has twenty-eight members and is involved in several peacekeeping and reconstruction missions worldwide.

The **Council of Europe** was founded in 1949 to achieve greater unity between its members by maintaining and developing the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. It currently has forty-seven member states and is home to the European Court of Human Rights which deals with cases relating to the European Convention on Human Rights. The judgments of the Court are binding upon the member states. (Note that the Council of Europe should not be confused with the European Council, an EU institution that hosts the Heads of State and Government of the EU member states.)

The **Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC)** was set up in 1948 in order to administer the Marshall Plan, a US-funded package for economic recovery of Europe. In 1960 it was succeeded by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which focuses on analysing and forecasting the economic policies of its thirty-four members.

The **Benelux** was founded in 1944 by the governments-in-exile of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg with the aim of forming a customs union. It was upgraded to an economic union in 1958. A new treaty expanding cooperation to sustainable development and judicial cooperation entered into force in 2010.

French National Planning Board, who came up with a plan that would pool the coal and steel production of France and Germany and create a common market.

On 9 May 1950 Monnet's scheme was presented by the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Robert Schuman, in a declaration that is nowadays considered to be the EU's founding moment. This is how Schuman outlined this philosophy:

Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity. The rassemblement of the nations of Europe requires the elimination of the age-old opposition of France and Germany. Any action taken must in the first place concern these two

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countries. With this aim in view, the French Government proposes to take action immediately on one limited but decisive point. It proposes to place Franco-German production of coal and steel as a whole under a common higher authority, within the framework of an organisation open to the participation of the other countries of Europe. [...] In this way there will be realised simply and speedily that fusion of interests which is indispensable to the establishment of a common economic system; it may be the leaven from which may grow a wider and deeper community between countries long opposed to one another by sanguinary divisions. By pooling basic production and by instituting a new higher authority, whose decisions will bind France, Germany, and other member countries, this proposal will lead to the realisation of the first concrete foundation of a European federation indispensable to the preservation of peace.

Robert Schuman, *The Schuman Declaration*. Fondation Robert Schuman  
(<http://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/declaration-of-9-may-1950>).

Two things in the excerpt from Schuman’s speech merit attention. First, the plan was innovative because it proposed the institution of an impartial body – the High Authority – that would be empowered to monitor and execute the agreement between the member states. This feature would give the ECSC the characteristics of a **supranational organization**: member states handed over part of their sovereignty to a third, neutral party that would supervise the execution of the terms of the treaty. In Schuman’s plan the High Authority was authorized to make decisions that were needed to execute the agreements laid down in the treaty. And in those cases where member states and the High Authority disagreed, they would be able to bring their dispute to a court that would be authorized to issue a binding judgment. The supranational formula differentiated the organization from all the other organizations which had been set up so far: these had been **intergovernmental organizations**.

**Supranational organizations:** organizations in which countries pool their sovereignty on certain matters to allow joint decision-making.

**Intergovernmental organizations:** organizations in which member states work together on policies of common concern but retain their full sovereignty.

A second important feature of the plan was its limited scope. Cooperation would start on a small basis by first trying to manage the common market for coal and steel. It was a deliberate decision to do this, because it was absolutely clear that the time was not ripe yet for a fully fledged federal state. In such a federal state member states should have been willing to cease to be independent and become part of a United States of Europe. Although at the time this was of course a bridge too far, there were many federalists that actively promoted these ideals and strived for a development of integration in this direction. In their view the supranational model acted as a halfway house on the road to a truly federal state. Small and concrete steps would provide the foundations for an eventual transfer of sovereignty to a new centre.

Schuman’s plan needed to be turned into a treaty between the countries that wanted to take part in this experiment. In addition to France, five countries joined the negotiations. Germany was very happy to accept France’s invitation. It was the first time that it would be treated on an equal footing and it made



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possible the abolition of the Ruhr Authority. The countries of the Benelux (Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg) simply had to join because their economies depended very much on those of France and Germany. Italy joined the negotiations for both political and economic reasons. Just like Germany it wanted to regain respectability after the war. It also felt its industry would benefit from being part of the common market for coal and steel.

Negotiations on the treaty took almost a year. Opinions differed on the amount of power that should be given to the High Authority and the ways in which it could and should be controlled. The Dutch and the Germans successfully insisted on a solution that would make it possible for the member states to supervise the High Authority. The result was an additional body in the form of the Council of Ministers that would represent the governments of the member states. The Council constituted an intergovernmental institution that would act as a counterweight to the supranational High Authority.

On 18 April 1951 the six countries signed the Treaty of Paris which formally established the European Coal and Steel Community. The Community's four main institutions were:

- a Council of Ministers, representing the member state governments, to co-decide on policies not provided for in the Treaty;
- a High Authority, consisting of independent appointees, acting as a daily executive making decisions on the basis of the Treaty provisions;
- a Court of Justice, consisting of independent judges, to interpret the Treaty and adjudicate conflicts between member states and the High Authority;
- a Common Assembly, drawn from members of national parliaments, to monitor the activities of the High Authority.

The initial institutional design of the ECSC proved to be quite resilient. It is still clearly visible in the institutional make-up of the EU today and it provided the template for organizing the other Communities that were set up in the decades to come.

### ■ A brief historical survey of European integration

In order to better capture the historical developments it is useful to look at three different questions that help explain the steps that were taken over the decades.

- In which areas did member states decide to cooperate? This question looks at the *policies* that member states agreed upon. The first way to chart the history of integration is by tracing the incorporation of new policy areas over time.
- How did the member states organize their cooperative efforts? This second question looks at the *institutional framework* they put in place to make these policies. It examines the institutions that were set up, their powers and the way they arrive at decisions.



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- Which countries became members? This question looks at the developments in the organization’s *membership*. The process of enlargement charts this third element of European integration.

When surveying the EU’s history, it is useful to keep the above distinctions in mind. In addition to the historical overview below, the book’s website ([www.navigatingthe.eu](http://www.navigatingthe.eu)) contains a timeline that gives an overview of the main events with respect to these three questions.

In a formal sense steps in integration are characterized by the adoption of treaties in which member states agree to cooperate in certain areas as well as by subsequent amendments to such treaties. Table 1.1 lists the four founding treaties: the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Economic Community, the European Atomic Energy Community and the European Union. The founding treaties have been amended frequently in order to incorporate changes in policies, the institutions and membership. The table therefore also lists the most important amending treaties. Note that in 2002 the ECSC treaty expired whilst the EEC treaty was renamed twice, and is now known as the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

*The 1950s: from one to three Communities*

After the six founding members had **ratified** the Treaty of Paris, the ECSC started operation in July 1952, with Jean Monnet as the first President of the High Authority. In the meantime new integrative steps were underway. The Korean War, between communist North Korea and capitalist South Korea, heightened concerns about the global threat of communism. The USA therefore pressed for a rearmament of the FRG that would bolster the defensive capabilities of Western Europe and defend the West German border against a possible attack from the east. For the French in particular the prospect of an independent Germany with its own army was unacceptable, however. A solution was found in following the ECSC model: West German troops would be brought under a supranational command. In April 1952 the member states agreed on a European Defence Community (EDC) that would establish such a structure. Soon thereafter another treaty – European Political Community (EPC) – was drafted in order to provide for an appropriate institutional framework that would give political guidance to the activities of the EDC. The initial plans that were proposed by a constitutional committee drawn from the ECSC parliamentary assembly consisted of setting up a quasi-federal legislature consisting of a Chamber of the Peoples, elected by direct suffrage, and a European Senate appointed by national parliaments.

**Ratification:** procedure through which a member state formally commits itself to a treaty, in most countries via a majority vote by its parliament.

The pace of integration was remarkable: only three years after the Treaty of Paris, the ECSC members were on the brink of taking major steps both in terms of policies and in terms of the accompanying institutional structures.

Table 1.1 An overview of the major treaties. (Founding treaties in bold)

Treaty name	Year signed	Entry into force	Type	Treaty establishing
Treaty of Paris	1951	1952	Founding	European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)
Treaties of Rome	1957	1958	Founding	European Economic Community (EEC) European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom)
Single European Act	1986	1987	Amending	
Treaty of Maastricht	1992	1993	Amending/ Founding	Treaty on European Community (TEC)
Treaty of Amsterdam	1997	1999	Amending	
Treaty of Nice	2001	2003	Amending	Expired 2002 merged with TEC
Treaty of Lisbon	2007	2009	Amending	Treaty on Functioning of European Union (TFEU) Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom)
				Treaty on European Union (TEU)