PROLOGUE

In 2017, the British street artist Banksy painted a mural of a man on a ladder chiselling one of the stars out of the EU flag. The painting is on a building in Dover, which has been one of Britain's most important connections to mainland Europe since ancient times. Today its port handles almost 20 per cent of Britain's trade. While we may not know who 'Banksy' really is, there can be no doubt that his work is a commentary on the British decision to leave the European Union, or Brexit.

Today it often appears as though the European Union's best days are behind it, that it has entered existential crisis after decades of success. Before Brexit there was Grexit and trouble in the Eurozone. Now we see squabbling over refugees. The question of failure or collapse of the integration project is on everyone's lips. The walls are crumbling, the demolition crew is on its way and the EU is operating in crisis mode.

Against the troubles of the present, the early history of the European project since the 1950s shines all the brighter, at least according to some. In 2012 the European Union received the Nobel Peace Prize on the grounds that it and its forerunners 'have for over six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe'.[1] Those achievements are felt to be in danger today, more than one star threatens to fall from the deep-blue sky. So Banksy's monumental artwork, which fills the end wall of a three-storey building, represents a fitting commentary on one of the most burning issues for Europe today.

Figure 1: Banksy's mural in Dover. Glyn Kirk/AFP/Getty Images

At second glance we discover there is more to the image. Closer examination reveals that there were already cracks in the wall before Banksy's demolition man started swinging his hammer. He is destroying the star, but leaving little mark on the wall. And the ladder is very long and looks rather wobbly. How much will he demolish? And is the man perhaps in more danger than the flag?

Other aspects remain unsaid. The number of stars has always been twelve, since the 1950s. That did not change with enlargement, and will not change with Brexit. In fact for its first thirty years the flag was not even the symbol of the EU or its predecessors, but of the much less prominent Council of Europe. If Banksy had painted his mural in 1973, when the United Kingdom joined the European Community, nobody would have understood it. Back then, the symbol was obscure. Today media in places as far-flung as the United States, Uruguay, Thailand and Russia report the story; everyone understands what the symbol means and why it is important. But the questions do not end

with the depicted flag; the same applies to the choice of location. Banksy chose a building already slated for demolition – so will the loss of one star change the broader course of events at all? And how to read that the mural was painted over in 2019?

And with that, I have outlined the questions addressed in this volume. The EU's crisis today appears uniquely deep. But is the situation really so unusual? The EU's self-image could not be more positive. It stands for peace, prosperity, values and integration. Its adversaries condemn it as a bureaucratic monster munching up national sovereignty: at best wasteful, at worst dangerous.

Whatever one thinks of the outcome, in retrospect it appears as though the precursors of today's European Union created the whole show all on their own and practically inevitably. As I will demonstrate in this book, the EU's exaggerated self-image exacerbates the contemporary perception of crisis, because phenomena we have actually already seen before are interpreted as new and threatening. And at the same time the core of today's problem is overlooked. The volume scrutinises many of the myths that have grown up around the history of European integration, along with the criticisms the EU so frequently finds itself confronted with. This is a critical history that asks how and why the EU really emerged and what it achieved, digging beyond the political rhetoric and cheap polemics. What we find is that it has fundamentally changed over the course of its history, and how improbable its undeniable importance today would have appeared just a few decades ago. Many of the aspects we today project back onto the early years in fact only took shape much more recently.

In order to gain a proper understanding we must free ourselves from a number of methodological corsets. The first of these is an excessive concentration on motives and driving forces. While that is the approach adopted by most authors to date, most people are more interested in the concrete effects and results of European integration. And about these we know astonishingly little, echoing the way the EU in general has remained very abstract and intangible for most ordinary people. They are not alone in this. In fact many historians describing the history of Europe in the twentieth century devote little space to European integration and plainly believe it to be a rather marginal factor.[2] In this volume I show how the European Community already had important effects in certain spheres at an early stage, and in others above all from the 1970s and 1980s. But these were not always the areas

to which the EU itself attributes important effects in retrospect. This becomes very clear if we look beyond the internal dynamics between the member states and consider what European integration meant for global problems like the Cuban Missile Crisis, world trade policy and the end of the Cold War – and for Algerian vintners, Argentine generals and Japanese carmakers. Altogether the foundations for the defining position the EU occupies today were laid before the Maastricht Treaty of 1992.

Secondly, I am not interested in chronicling every step towards integration as the coming together of equal sovereign states that have agreed on shared rules and institutions and recapitulating the history of the organisation. Given the amount that happened, we would just get lost in the technical details or, even more likely, bored with an endless succession of negotiating rounds. At the same time, this approach easily creates a teleological narrative where deepening and expansion are the only modes of history, interrupted by occasional phases of standstill overcome by heroic efforts.[3] This is frequently written as a succession of conflicts between great men (and a few women) where the roles are clear: Jean Monnet, Konrad Adenauer, Alcide de Gasperi and Paul-Henri Spaak, Jacques Delors and Helmut Kohl are the goodies, the pro-European visionaries; Charles de Gaulle, Andreas Papandreou and Margaret Thatcher the biggest villains. In the euro-sceptic version the roles are simply reversed. In fact we have long known that Monnet, Adenauer and Spaak also pursued national interests and had no truck with idealistic notions of abolishing the nation state,[4] while de Gaulle and Thatcher made a lot of noise but got along astonishingly well with the EC in certain questions. At the same time, a focus on political leaders overlooks the frequently much more interesting actors in the second row. Follow-on decisions and bureaucratic routine in concrete policy areas often turn out to be more important than the personalities of the heads of state and government. A chronological approach also easily loses sight of the fact that the European option never represented the only alternative to the nation state. Finally, this approach also suppresses the absolutely decisive question of how the effects of the negotiations played out, away from the political spotlight.

Instead, each of the following eight chapters examines a central issue in connection with the history of the EU. What was its contribution to peace and security? Did it really create economic growth and prosperity as so often asserted? I also explore the central tensions in the integration process, for example between participation and

technocracy. Each chapter stands on its own. Apart from the first, they can be read in any order – although a proper overview will only emerge when all the parts are reflected together.

The problem-orientated approach chosen here should not be confused with organisation by policy area. For example, refugee and asylum policy plays no role in this book because it only came to prominence after the period discussed here. Nevertheless the various chapters do generate an understanding of the basic structures of more recent debates. A systematising approach reveals the asynchronicities – and the surprising coincidences – between the dynamics in areas as different as peace and security, prosperity and growth, and values and norms.

Thirdly it is a challenge to maintain analytical distance to the arguments of supporters and opponents of the integration process since the 1940s. The most obvious example is the assumption that European integration in today's European Union differs fundamentally from other forms of international cooperation and should therefore be examined in isolation. For one side this is reason to praise the process; for the other to condemn it even more strongly as artificial. It is true that the EU today occupies a special status unavailable to organisations like the Council of Europe or the OECD. But that was not always the case, as I show in Chapter 1. There I also discuss how the EC was ultimately able to achieve precedence over other international organisations in Western Europe – and went on to rise out of that sphere altogether. But later developments should not be projected back onto the early years. For example the EC actually played a fairly marginal role in securing peace in the first two post-war decades – but later became more significant in this respect. In order to arrive at a balanced analysis we need to measure the precursors of today's EU against other forms of international co-operation in Europe. This is why it is so important to compare a multitude of sources and perspectives. It would also be false to merely concentrate on one national outlook. Instead it is imperative to contrast this with other perspectives. Understanding the history of European integration means listening to the others.

Words are never easy, and the term 'Europe' is especially tricky. 'Whoever speaks of Europe is wrong', wrote Reich Chancellor Otto von Bismarck in the margins of a letter in 1876. His scribbled note in French referred to a Russian call to respond jointly to a crisis in the name of Europe.[5] To Bismarck Europe did not represent a genuinely political concept; solidarity in the name of the continent was an impossibility.

History since 1945 has proved him wrong. Nevertheless his biting comment indicates an important point. We have become accustomed to saying 'Europe' when we mean the European Union, and vice versa. Yet the EU has never included the whole of Europe, and the institutional and legal EU is much more concrete than the rather vague idea of Europe. One can criticise the confusion of Europe with the EU and its precursors as a presumptive and ahistorical distortion. Or one can investigate the history of the twentieth century in order to understand why a rather narrow organisation that initially comprised just six Western European states is today so frequently equated with Europe as a whole. That is what this book is about.

When discussing the history of cooperation and integration in Europe one must also distinguish carefully between planning, implementation and impact, regardless of whether they occurred in the scope of the EC or another organisational context. For there was often a rather complex relationship between the intended and the realised; intentions should not be confused with effects. Nor did planning always precede realisation as clearly as most of the existing descriptions of the history of European integration would have it, when they start from the ideas and seek to describe their successive realisation. Of course much had been written about peace through European federation since the end of the Middle Ages and one could present an impressive ancestral gallery: Dante Alighieri, Immanuel Kant and Victor Hugo to start with. But for most of the time these and similar ideas remained extremely marginal. The kind of international economic and technical cooperation that began in the nineteenth century – in areas such as cross-border infrastructures (for example navigation on the Rhine), reducing trade protectionism or later developing electricity grids – was at least as important for the history of European integration since 1945.[6] While the Great War was quickly followed by the Second and permanent peace remained elusive, a parade of almost unknown organisations notched up impressive achievements in the sphere of second-order problems. Nevertheless in 1945 political integration in Europe was still only one possible future among many – and a rather unlikely one at that.

And still. In the beginning was the Second World War. Without it – without the destruction, the delegitimisation of hypertrophic nationalism, the decline of European global dominance and the fear of further German aggression – European integration would

never have shifted from the realm of the thinkable to the realm of the politically plausible.

At the same time another war was needed as the indispensable context for turning possibility into reality: the Cold War. The shared fear of communism and the emerging Soviet-led Eastern Bloc functioned as an external brace holding the states together – and explains why 'European' integration increasingly applied only to Western Europe. This does not mean that the integration process was completely determined by the Cold War, though; otherwise the process would have ended in 1989.[7]

This eastward-looking anti-hegemonic anti-communism was accompanied by an ambivalent relationship towards the West. Many early proponents of European integration also sought to position Western Europe as a 'third force' vis-à-vis the United States, and as such to escape the superpower polarity. This idea found support in the late 1940s and 1950s especially in Western European social democratic parties, for example in France, the Netherlands and West Germany, as well as the left wing of the British Labour Party. De Gaulle also pursued a similar course on Europe.

The United States nevertheless massively supported the integration process. The US security guarantee – which made it Western Europe's hegemonic power – thus became one of the defining framework conditions for all moves towards European cooperation and integration from the late 1940s.

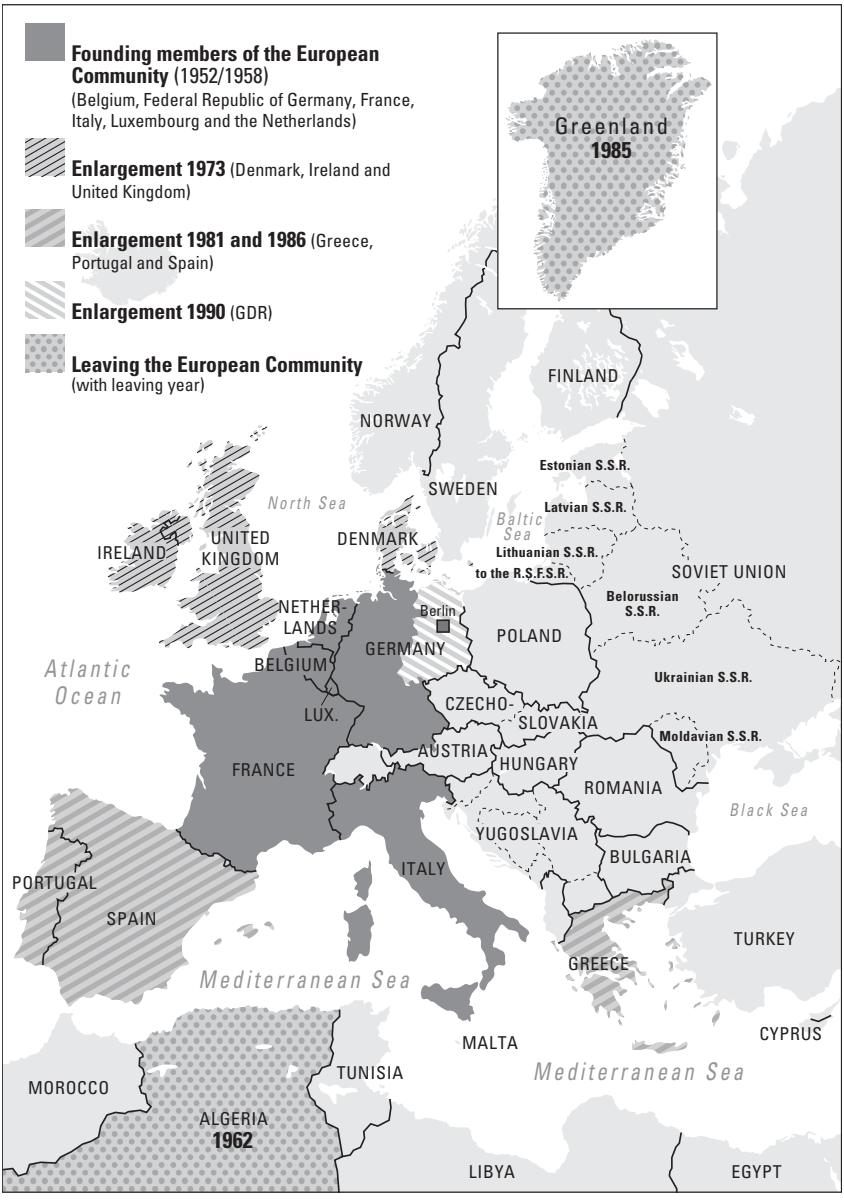
The terminology itself demonstrates just how hard it is to define European integration. The entities that were to become the European Union of today often changed their form, responsibilities and even name. The EU originated in the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) founded in 1951, and two other organisations established in 1957 by the so-called Treaties of Rome, the European Economic Community (EEC) and Euratom. That sounds rather technical and indeed it was. Only over time did these three largely independent organisations join more closely together, and for the period until the Maastricht Treaty one should actually speak of the 'European Communities' in the plural. From the 1970s the European Political Cooperation and the summits of heads of state and government gradually institutionalised, initially outside the three core Communities. Maastricht rearranged the organisational structure. The institutional framework appears confusing, but is not really difficult to explain. It indicates that the history of European integration is

full of far-reaching hopes, unintended consequences, initially invisible new starts and slow reorientations. These contexts shaped not only the history of the EC's precursors, but also other initiatives for European cooperation (of which more below).

In the following I refer to the pre-Maastricht European Communities in the singular, and not only for reasons of legibility. Interestingly in certain European languages – including German and French – the entity was increasingly discussed in the singular from the 1970s and the European Community was increasingly equated with Europe.[8] In English the term 'Common Market', with its very different allusions, tended to be preferred.

In another respect too, the EC is difficult to grasp. There was not one big blueprint for its development. Rather than a unified will we frequently encounter a complex web of different and contradictory motives. National affiliation was by no means always the determining factor when representatives of different states met. Often enough political/ideological affiliations meant more: federalists, technocrats, Christian conservatives, social democrats and so on hobnobbed with their own circles, and the same applies to the different generations with their respective experiences and expectations. So the EC became a stage on which intergovernmental negotiations and international political dramas played out. Non-state actors, such as representatives of major companies and various economic sectors, journalists and trade unionists, also left their marks. In many questions the EC became significantly more than just the platform or instrument of national interests, gradually assuming the semblance of a proactive subject capable of planning and implementing. In these cases it frequently succeeded – precisely on the grounds of its vagueness – in representing more than the sum of its member states and pursuing an independent course. Altogether the EC therefore sometimes recalls a puppet played by the large member states; sometimes Superman, and sometimes Robert Musil's *Man Without Qualities*: an actor with great potential and a sense of possibility searching for a meaningful existence.

Understanding the history of European integration not as the implementation of a grand plan, but taking seriously the diversity and vicissitudes of the associated projects, changes the perspective. The heart of the matter is not the 'ever closer union' invoked in slightly varying forms in all major treaties since 1957:[9] the impression that European integration followed this model at least until the Maastricht



Map 1: Changes in EC membership until 1992. © Peter Palm, Berlin/Germany

Treaty is superficial. Academic and public discussion to date has always been obsessed with successive enlargement rounds. The six founding states were joined in 1973 by the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark. Greece followed in 1981; Spain and Portugal in 1986; and

even before Maastricht the EC crossed the (now defunct) Iron Curtain in 1990 when the territory of East Germany joined on German reunification. Under this widespread perspective the EC was always expanding, and Brexit presented the first fundamental shock.

In fact Algeria and Greenland both left the EC long before Maastricht. In very general terms enlargement and deepening were always accompanied by important countervailing tendencies. Even below the level of formal membership there were processes of disintegration and dysfunctionality, which relativise both the story of successive enlargement and deepening and the currently fashionable view that the integration process is set for its first ever reversal.

Many of these tensions resulted from diverging interests between the member states and their resistance to permitting integration to proceed all too far. The EC was first and foremost a creature of nation states, for which the choice for Europe was an effective means to withstand the tides of Cold War tension, decolonisation and globalisation. Without the nation states European integration would have unfolded in a very different form. Even if they did not always succeed in absolutely determining the course of developments, they did place their decisive stamp on it. That was already visible in the establishment of the EC institutions. When Robert Schuman in 1950 presented the plan that came to bear his name, he spoke only of a supranational executive organ, the later High Authority. This organ was quickly supplemented by a Council of Ministers, because there was no way the member states' governments were going to relinquish their powers completely to a new institution. A parliamentary Common Assembly somewhat relativised the power of the governments and an independent Court of Justice provided legal oversight. Altogether this created a complex system of checks and balances in which the roles of the Community, the member states and other actors were continuously being rebalanced. This occurred most spectacularly in the so-called Luxembourg compromise in 1966, which overturned the slow progression from more intergovernmental to more supranational set out in the original treaties. There were also further changes in the interplay of the institutions, with the representations of the member states today playing a larger role in certain questions than they did in the 1970s and 1980s.

Indeed, as we will see below, the 1970s represented a phase of deep transformation where the EC acquired a truly significant role for the first time. Whether we consider its contribution to peace, to growth