

CULTURE, ELITES AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION¹

There have been several points at which proponents of a united Europe have thought it timely to take stock, and to consider how far integration has come, and where it should be going. Now is another of those points. The euro-currency crisis has prompted it, leading to renewed talk of a ‘two-speed’ Europe, of a stand-still budget, and of referenda to ascertain the popular will on repatriation of powers, and even of continued membership of the EU. This book is a much-needed forum for thinkers about Europe – neither elected politicians, nor civil servants – to exchange ideas about what is desirable and what is possible in the evolving idea that is Europe.

It is not enough to bask in mutual congratulation at how far we have come since 1945, and to lay wreaths at the tombs of Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman. As Nicolae Păun says in his introduction, we are still searching for a firm theoretical and practical basis for the ‘new paradigm’ of a Europe aware of its ‘common identity’; there is still work to be done to live down the pre-1945 ‘triumph of nationalism’. It is worth reminding ourselves that we have not gone to war with each other since that time, and that the likelihood of our doing so is wonderfully remote; but bones of contention are no longer made of coal and steel. We recognise that there are ties that bind us; but sometimes, and to some groups, these ties are woven of Brussels red tape, or they are fetters.

In his tailpiece to the present volume, Simion Costea points out just how democratically accountable Brussels is and of how radically unlike Moscow it is, in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Vladimir Bukovsky, with whom Costea contends, has grown too suspicious of unions in general, of co-ordination, of negotiation, if he imagines that the EU and the USSR can be compared to the detriment of the union of consenting adults that is today’s EU. Costea stops short of ridicule, but in a few pages, he dismantles Bukovsky’s decade-long diatribe, piece by piece. Americans, who despaired of factional Europe, to whose rescue they consented grudgingly to ride, who gave encouragement to European unity, even if only so that they would know whom to telephone in an emergency, those Americans must share Costea’s surprise that Bukovsky could so have so have misunderstood what the

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European Union is about as to support the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) – a party that is as determined to pull the United Kingdom out of the EU as the Scottish National Party is to pull Scotland out of the UK. We seem to have come a long way from the realisation that international law is a whole lot better than international war: that we might do better together what we failed to do apart. John F. Kennedy urged Americans, in his inauguration speech, to: ‘Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country’. Has Europe come to mean for its members only what they can get out of it, moaning when they think they are giving more than they get?

‘This volume’, says Nicolae Păun, ‘explores theories pertaining to European integration which are not commonly analysed by experts in this area’. A number of papers, indeed, concern countries that are not members – or not yet members – of the EU. Nina Didenko analyses corporate social responsibility in Ukraine, for example, and considers the problems encountered in bringing Ukrainian practice into line with that of the EU. Michel Labori looks at relations between the EU and Morocco and asks how relations can be tuned in such a way that both parties benefit from the relationship without Morocco’s being given the impression that it might one day be a member of the Union. Equally unexpectedly, perhaps, Catinca Oncescu brings our attention to the relationship between the EU and Lebanon in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). What is there in it for the two parties when, again, there can be little prospect of Lebanon’s achieving EU membership? Finally, among these outliers, there is the mighty China: Nicoleta Vasilcovski writes about China’s economic diplomacy, where the EU’s interests are implicit rather than spelt out.

These are valuable feelers: there will be those who fear that such outreach programmes smack of empire-building; but these are not recruitment-drives – the EU has probably learnt the lessons that it needed to learn from its rapid expansion in the first decade of this century; they are the consequence of the EU’s now far-removed boundary-fences, and of the need to talk to new neighbours, as well as to rising-star competitors, Brazil, Russia, India, and China (the so-called BRIC quartet).

There are papers here that focus on pressing current issues: Lucreția Dogaru, for instance, examines EU policy on environmental protection and sustainable development; and Dragoș Păun and Mihaela Göndör consider the possibilities of a common EU fiscal policy, and the Stability and Growth Pact, respectively. There can be little doubt but that the most serious challenges facing today’s EU are the debt crisis; the fundamental imbalance between north and south; and what some see as the promise and others see as the threat, of tax-harmonisation. ‘It is clear that the European Union has to solve the debt crisis and has to redesign the European Economic and Monetary Union’. This is Dragoș Păun’s conclusion: nobody could disagree with it, even if nobody at present seems to know how to do it.

What is most striking about this volume, of course, will be its Romanian eye-view. The majority of the contributions are by Romanians teaching in Romanian

universities. It should not be imagined that this presentation of a rather special case limits the value of the collection. Liviu Ștefan Răncioagă's sponsorship of Moldova's accession to the EU may, for example, look like a sophisticated bid for annexation of that historically-contested sliver of a country – howbeit the case is persuasive; and Valeriu Ivan's focus on the protection of Romania's economic interests in the face of EU competitiveness will look like special pleading. It might seem that to dwell on Romania's historical relationship with other EU countries is still more open to question: thus, Lucian Săcălean fastens on the minority groups who have been the unwitting cause of tension between Romania and Hungary over decades (Săcălean takes us from the Congress of Vienna in 1815, through to the period between the two world wars – he studiously avoids comment on the post-war picture); Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean takes as his subject the diaspora of Romanian intellectuals in France after 1945; and Maria Costea pores over military reports to throw light on Romanian-Bulgarian relations between the world wars (happily, the South Dobrudja issue was resolved almost satisfactorily).

If the inclusion of such papers is open to question, the question is soon answered: the concerted perspectives of new members of the EU are just the ones of which we are too often deprived who keep foreign correspondents in Paris and Berlin, but not in Bucharest, Budapest, or Sofia. We on the western fringes of the union need to know how it feels to be citizens of countries on the new 'eastern front'. There is a risk that such a collection of papers as this, written by academics, will not speak to the non-academics whose narrowly metropolitan views stand in most need of exposure to perspectives from the periphery. There is much reference to treaties and pacts and resolutions; there is much technical language; and there are lots of lists and abbreviations. This is at once an understandable necessity, and a pity. There are insights here, written by the few for the few, that deserve a wider audience.

Nicolae Păun describes the European Union as a 'site under construction': if Rome wasn't built in a day, a coherent Europe built on the Treaty of Rome certainly won't be. The question is: how to commend a yet more integrated Europe to a sometimes suspicious electorate? Do the people, or the politicians, in any of the twenty-seven sovereign nations of the EU actually want to pool together as much as they say they want to 'pull together'? The USSR fell because it was incapable of reforming itself; according to Bukovsky, this will be the fate of the EU – and he looks forward to it. Costea shares Păun's conviction that the EU of today is the resultant of a long process of reform; the challenge will be to carry the process further, and to carry Europeans with it. As he says in his final clarion call:

We believe that the solution is a stronger and wider European Union, a more efficient, more democratic, more transparent European Union that keeps closer to the interests of its citizens.

This will be the trick: to integrate (only) to the extent, and at the speed, that is consonant with the collective will of those citizens. At the moment, the suspiciousness towards integration would seem to outweigh the enthusiasm for it; and

poor Mr Herman Achille Van Rompuy is no John Fitzgerald Kennedy. The EU began in a pooling of coal and steel assets in the interests of collective security; Ioana Leucea reminds us in her paper that Europe still is about security:

Europeans cannot be secure while others in the world live in severe insecurity (...) The European Union is a political experiment that cannot be confined by territory.

This is the message of this volume: that if Europeans are going to reach out to Ukraine, and Lebanon, and China, and the BRIC quartet – and if Romania, along with other sovereign members of the union, is to play any part in this reaching out – what is wanted is an inclusive Europe, not a quarrelsome gaggle of exclusionary nation-states.

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