

Abstract

The European Union, a direct consequence of the Second World War and a successful solution for a lasting peace on the continent

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We cannot understand the world today without knowing the world of yesterday. This aphorism is especially true in an area as fluid as the international relations. How can we understand a state's decisions in relation to other states? How can we know the motivations behind them? And even more so, how can we somehow estimate future decisions of states or supranational actors on the geopolitical world stage? One possible answer – and perhaps the most eloquent – is the appeal to history.

History can be truly fascinating to the researcher, especially when following the events chained in their causality. Without a particular event taking place, none of the ones that followed would have been possible or, anyway, not as they happened.

This is also the perspective from which we have analysed the emergence and the evolution of the supranational entity which today is known as the European Union, by demonstrating that it represents a direct consequence of the Second World War and a successful solution, the only one at the time, for maintaining a lasting peace on the continent – by managing to answer the two main questions arising in postwar Europe: 1. How to limit, if not to eliminate, the possible revanchist tendencies of a defeated Germany and 2. How to block the expansion of the new major enemy of democracy, the Soviet Union.

As early as 1888, Henry Main was acknowledging that "war appears to be as old as mankind, but peace is a modern invention"¹, which, at first glance, seems an indisputable statement. There is ample evidence in support of it, whether archaeological or anthropological, although perhaps most important in this matter is today's subjective perception of the last century.

Not coincidentally, 20th-century Europe has entered history books mainly through the ideological conflicts and the devastating wars that have plagued it, which has justified on the part of historians the use of phrases such as the "dark continent"² or the "age of extremes"³. Eric Hobsbawm even shortens the 20th century by more than twenty years, limiting it to the time period between the First World War and the end of the Cold War while noting that this century "lived and thought in terms of world war, even when the guns were silent and the bombs were not exploding"⁴. There are other authors – mainly statesmen who, in their memoirs, have described their involvement in events – who, on the other hand, propose a positive-hyperbolic vision of the second half of the 20th century, starting from the "miraculous" restoration of Europe following the war, the absence of armed conflicts between European states and the extension of inter- and supranational collaboration formulas on the continent – thus, the normalization of prosperity, the regaining of optimism and the ensuing lasting peace. Of course, a realistic interpretation of the European post-war history – especially with regards to Eastern Europe – urges us to prudently distance ourselves from this predominantly optimistic, westernist vision of the continent after the Second World War. As attractive as it may seem, there are plenty of researchers who reject the predominantly positive image of the continent's unexpected recovery after 1945 – the deeply pacifist continent, which rose "like a Phoenix" from the ashes of its murderous and suicidal past – and qualify it bluntly as a myth. "Like many myths, this rather agreeable account of Europe in the second half

¹ *Apud* Michael Howard, *The Invention of Peace and the Reinvention of War*, Profile, London, 2000, p. 1.

² See Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, Allen Lane, London, 1998.

³ See Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, Michael Joseph, London, 1994.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

of the twentieth century contains a kernel of truth. But it leaves out a lot."⁵ For not only that Eastern Europe has no place in this picture, but it also leaves out that Western Europe, prosperous and eager to develop in a state of *peace*, "was not born of the optimistic, ambitious, forward-looking project imagined in fond retrospect by today's Euro-idealists. It was the insecure child of anxiety."⁶

In this interpretation of Europe's tragic and violent history, the *war* becomes the continent's evolutionary matrix, while *peace* can only be a limited intermezzo between two conflicts. The classic example in this regard, not without arguments, is the depiction by some specialists of the period between 1914 and 1945 as "thirty-one years of world conflict"⁷ or "thirty years of Civil War"⁸ in Europe. However, even if war, conflict in general, is seen, in retrospect, as an evolutionary framework or as an inflection point in the evolution of mankind, one may also argue that equally essential in the evolution of humanity are the critical moments immediately following the end of the conflicts, when the defeated and the victors are forced to overcome the rivalries that divided them, to heal their wounds and to give meaning to the huge material and human losses suffered. Even if, at least at the beginning, there is a greater need for stability rather than reconciliation, the history of the last seven decades in Europe demonstrates that lasting peace on the continent is possible.

Finally, in recent years, researchers tend to return to a more optimistic vision of the European path in the 20th century and tackle the post-war decades from a less bleak perspective, in the light of the peace (understood as the lack of war) that settled on the continent at the end of the Second World War and of the unprecedented advancements which occurred in Europe. Jay Winter, a well-known First World War specialist, states that "the history of the twentieth century is almost always written as the story of a series of catastrophes"⁹ and confesses that, for more than forty years, he too has contributed to

⁵ Tony Judt, *Postwar. A history of Europe Since 1945*, The Penguin Press, New York, 2005, p. 5.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

⁷ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, p. 25-26.

⁸ Enzo Traverso, *Fire and Blood: The European Civil War, 1914-1945*, Verso, London and New York, 2017.

⁹ Jay Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom Utopian Moments in the Twentieth Century*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2006, p. 1.

this "apocalyptic vision of the recent past. Yet for many years I have felt that this dominant historical narrative is incomplete."¹⁰ Another First World War specialist, John Horne, proposed a more scrupulous interpretation of the three periods of peace that followed the major conflicts of the last century (the two world wars and the Cold War), arguing that "another Europe was woven after the war, a Europe that emerged victorious because of its reconstruction forces and its reconciliation capabilities."¹¹ On the same note, the American historian James J. Sheehan, a specialist in German history in the 19th century, notes the somewhat unexpected transformation of Europeans, within a century, from a political culture marked by militarism, at the end of the 19th century, to a culture of peace, at the end of the 20th century – characterized by the fundamental attachment to a common set of values, among which a primordial place is occupied by the prosperity and the well being of their citizens.¹²

There is no doubt that a fundamental role in this seemingly impossible change of optics in the relations between states was the mass violence and the devastating material and human costs generated by the major conflagrations of the last century. After 1945, (Western) Europe responded to war, while understanding the need to maintain a necessarily peaceful climate for recovery and development, by shaping a "culture of peace" – as opposed to a "culture of war"¹³ – which, as we have seen, resulted in the creation of European institutions with the built-in potential of preserving peace. Equally, when discussing the post-war peace-generating factors, one cannot neglect the creation of the two opposing ideological blocs and the threat of mutual destruction by nuclear means, which has maintained the ensuing conflict between the two great victors of the Second World War in a "cold" spectrum that bypassed traditional areas of confrontation, such as Europe.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ John Horne, „Guerres et reconciliations européennes au 20e siècle”, in *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 2009/4, n° 104, p. 3.

¹² See James J. Sheehan, *Where have all the Soldiers Gone? The Transformation of Modern Europe*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston and New York, 2008.

¹³ Martin van Creveld, *The Culture of War*, Presidio Press, New York, 2008.

And yet, how was it possible that, within a century, the European's views on peace and war would change so much that, beginning with 1945, Europe would experience lasting peace, even though, by then, it was the bloody theatre of the most devastating conflicts known to mankind?

The answer is not simple, but it is simpler than one would expect. The end of the last world war was – using a term enshrined in historiography – the "zero hour", the starting point for the much needed reconstruction of a world that had failed miserably. The officials of the time understood that the disjunctive model of addressing state matters, which for centuries generated a permanent state of confrontation in Europe, could not continue, and the integrative solution appeared as the only viable option for obtaining and maintaining a lasting peace on the continent. Today, 70 years after the first institutional step in this direction – the establishment of the first European supranational organisation, the European Coal and Steel Community –, Europe is experiencing a level of integration that few would have imagined at first. The changes in the understanding of economy, governance and society are the overwhelming result of a profound change in attitude, possible only by accepting joint responsibility in maintaining a hard-earned and well-deserved European peace.

In 1945, faced with the devastating material and human costs that the recently concluded conflagration had generated, Europe finally realized the imperative of peace as an absolutely necessary precondition for the success of any attempt at recovery and development. In this respect, the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community, the first integrative entity at European level and the forerunner of the European Union today, revealed its potential in imposing and maintaining a lasting peace and succeeded in eliminating the old opposition between France and Germany by pooling the coal and steel industries which were essential for any war economy. Robert Schuman, the French foreign minister and one of the architects of the project, was convinced that pooling the two industries of France and Germany within the new supranational entity "could make war not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible".¹⁴

At the same time, the establishing of the European Coal and Steel Community occurs in the context of the beginning of the Cold War and the shaping of the new bipolar

¹⁴ https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/robert_schuman_ro.pdf, 23 June 2020.

world, in which the clash between the two power poles manifested itself on multiple levels – political, military, ideological, etc. – and aimed, on each side, at consolidating and expanding their own spheres of influence and domination established at the end of the Second World War. We cannot discuss any form of association between the European states, more so the future European Union, without analyzing the future economic and security implications, as a response to the effects of the war that ended and as protective measures against the war to come.

Whereas, for the two superpowers, former conjuncture allies – which were fundamentally different with regard to their ideology, political system and economic organization –, suspicions had settled earlier, the positions adopted on both sides in matters where their interests were clashing, only sharpened the already existing differences and led to the well-known scenario of the Cold War. Punctuated, from time to time, by "hot" moments, the extensive confrontation between the two superpowers – which generated the nuclear arms race and the diversification of weapons of mass destruction, the competition for the conquest of outer space, and a series of political-military crises whose consequences we still feel today – would also make its decisive mark on the evolution of Europe in the coming decades of the 20th century.

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As one could compellingly argue, the past has its mark on the present and, consequently, on the future. Therefore, a strong motivation for choosing our research theme was the identification of some "good practices" or "lessons learned" that could be applicable today, in the current and always effervescent geopolitical context, which affects all the more a state such as Romania, situated at the congruence of the spheres of influence of the great actors on the international stage.

Although, in the West, there is a vast bibliography covering the period of the first years after the end of the Second World War, we have not yet identified an analysis that explicitly deals with our proposed theme of research. Numerous authors have analysed this time period from the perspective of the conflict – more or less visible at that time – between the former Allies and the outbreak of the Cold War, but the works proposed by them only tangentially address our theme of interest – in Romania, all the more so. Our paper aims to help cover gaps in the knowledge of the period, to offer alternatives of

interpretation for certain decisions or political behaviors of the actors involved, to pursue, through a systematic, empirical and critical investigation, the validity of the hypotheses assumed in the research and, finally, to constitute an original and necessary approach, at least in the Romanian research landscape.

In this respect, in *Chapter 1*, entitled 'The idea of European unity in history', we analysed the idea of European unity from a historical point of view, showing that it is very old, with roots that can be identified since Antiquity, but which has acquired the meaning that we attribute to it today especially during the last millennium. We have shown that, in the medieval and modern times, there have been many projects regarding the continental unity – in order to ensure a long lasting peace –, and that the ideas contained in the proposed plans, such as those of the Abbot de Saint-Pierre, of Saint-Simon, Mazzini, Proudhon or Briand, lived on and were naturally continued at the end of the Second World War. We have concluded that, throughout history, the idea of Europe's political unity has always been formulated as a remedy for the wars that have plagued the Old World, and the thinkers who have proposed this solution have always started from the idea that war can only be eliminated by a rapprochement of states, in a formula closer than a simple association according to momentary interests – a unity based on a system of common values, which is also European. We have established that, throughout history, at an ideational level and beyond the realities of each era, the link between unity and peace – between a construction based on this unity and the deterrence of armed conflict – appears to be inextricable – and we have concluded that it is feasible to consider that the same logic led the political decision-makers at the end of the Second World War.

While, in this first chapter, we have shown that the fundamental intention which manifested at continental level over time was to find a solution that would lead to lasting peace in Europe and that the solution strongly proposed was European unity, in the following chapters we argue that the end of the Second World War was the right time for this idea to finally coagulate the energies needed to make it reality. In this respect, we have shown that the first and perhaps most important pillar on which European unity will be based on is war itself, as an answer to the need for avoiding the human and material losses. Avoiding a new conflict, the consequences of which would have been unimaginable – mankind had already stepped into the Age of the Atom –, thus became an

essential objective for political decision-makers in the period immediately following the conclusion of the conflagration.

In Chapter 2, "The German problem, between divergent strategic interests", we looked at the conditions existing at the end of the war and how the victors decided to address the "German problem" – identifying solutions in order to prevent the possibility of Germany recovering its military and economic potential and to initiate a new conflict. We assessed the implications of the Morgenthau Plan, a radical American proposal that provided for Germany's permanent occupation, its industrial disarmament and its transformation into a "mainly agrarian and pastoral country", showing that such an option would have permanently jeopardised the international economic system and would have made Germany an easy prey for the expansion of Soviet influence in Europe. We discussed the divergent nature of the interests of the two future superpowers, which originated in the increasingly different visions of what the post-war world would look like, and concluded that the interaction between them, in the German question, involved elements of potential conflict. In this regard, we have looked at the preconditions and motivations behind the Truman Doctrine, as well as the implementation of the Marshall Plan and its economic and political consequences. We have concluded that, from an American point of view, although the decentralisation of Germany's industry had been one of the objectives assumed by the Allies, its economic status forced a reconsideration of the structural reforms originally intended, at least in Western areas. Equally, Germany's future fate, with its industrial resources and economic potential, had become of major importance in American politics and could not have been considered separate from the projected evolution of the whole of Western Europe. We have also concluded that, by encouraging European reconstruction, the Truman Doctrine and the implementation of the Marshall Plan in Europe have made a major contribution to the creation and solidification of the Western bloc of states, with the aim of creating a stable power pole that will prevent the expansion of Soviet influence in the West.

As the "German problem" involved the restructuring of Germany, by imposing four general objectives – demilitarization, decentralisation, denazification and democratization – in *Chapter 3*, "Restoring an identity. From national to European", we turned our attention to how the process of denazification of German society was carried out,

insisting on its inherent psychological-identity component. We have shown that, with the changes occurred in the relationship between West and East, many of the legitimate expectations of German society, fractured by the decisions of their own wartime leaders – including the need for fairness, justice, identification and punishment of the guilty – would be marginalised or tacitly overcome, along the way, in favour of achieving more pragmatic objectives. We have argued that the process of denazification was necessary, by virtue of the collective memory of the last years, and in the case of West Germany, it contributed to the recoagulation of national energies in the concrete interest of recovery and development, once the initial expectation for punishing the guilty began to dissipate and the German society, as a whole, reached a certain level of normality. Moreover, for German policymakers, a much more attractive and effective narrative was building: that of the unity of the German people, built on common suffering and patriotism, in the interest of the restoration, re-democratization and recovery of lost freedoms. We have concluded that the process of denazification – with all the limitations we have identified – was one of the essential factors in the post-war reconstruction of German society and contributed greatly to the restoration of its national identity – one of the explanations for the European orientation towards Europe of the German political elites in the future West Germany and the emergence of a new way of understanding the functioning of the European democratic system. On this basis, starting in the 1950s, the country's European integration would be identified as a vital objective of the German nation, to which both political elites and society as a whole would contribute.

In *Chapter 4*, "The Franco-German Reconciliation, an essential requirement for the European future", we have analysed the relationship between France and Germany, starting from their traditionally antithetical history to reach the special relationship built by the two over the last 70 years. We have commented on the distinct steps taken by French politics, from the "obsession" for punishing and weakening Germany's capacities at the end of the war, to the profound change in attitude occurred with the Schuman Declaration, and we have commented extensively on the long-term implications of the historical Franco-German reconciliation. We have shown that the ability to manage potential conflicts between the two countries has increased over the decades since the end of the Second World War, and that this is also due to the general European framework in

which the two actors are evolving. To the extent that, today, the Franco-German relationship is the "engine" of Europe, one can also argue that the European Union is the glue that contributes to the endurance of this relationship, by forcing the two sides to constantly interact, assert their intentions and provoke them to resolve their inherent differences. Our conclusion was that the relationship built to this day is underwritten by a fundamental objective of the two countries, namely their definitive reconciliation, in the interests of common European stability, and that only such a shared political commitment can be the explanation for the current relationship of the two European poles of power – including the field of security, essential for their sovereignty and national interests – , a relationship that, beyond practical results, also has a deeply symbolic connotation.

In *Chapter 5*, "The birth of a new kind of democracy. The ideological equalization of the West", we addressed a subject with fecund potential for future research, proposing and defining the concept of "ideological equalization" of the Western Europe, by which we understand the limitation or even the elimination of differences in the approach of the system of democratic governing in Western Europe that occurred in the first years after the war. Starting from an interwar Europe in which a wide variety of ideologies or ideological currents coexisted, against the background of an obvious lack of ideological consensus, at the end of the war, a new formula for understanding democracy would be installed in Western Europe, which would lead to a mature model of government adopted naturally by all the states of the Western bloc. We have shown that this new democratic model was not just a form of government or political regime, but a comprehensive way of organizing government and society, based on principles accepted and respected by both state authority and citizens, and that the positioning of a state outside this model became impossible. In the emergence of this phenomenon, we have identified the contribution of several factors, the most eloquent of which are the orientation of Western societies towards the Christian-democratic values of the center-right – as a reaction to the radicalism proposed by the communist extreme left, which became the common and marginalized enemy in Western societies after 1947 – and the American strategic interests – which called for the restoration of a balance of power on the continent, by establishing solid political systems and, moreover, of a European bloc that shared the same political, social, economic and cultural values as those across the Atlantic,

following the deterioration of relations between the US and the USSR. We have established that this socio-political phenomenon had a broad significance in the early post-war years and, even though, from today's perspective, it can be considered natural, it has made a remarkable contribution to the recovery of relations between states and, furthermore, to the success of the European integrative project.

Chapter 6, entitled "The Schuman Plan. A successful experiment" is dedicated to the moment of the Schuman Declaration, the decisive step for the common European future, and the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community. We have shown that the idea of pooling the coal and steel industries of France and Germany – which were joined by the other four original member states – had the stated objective of "making war not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible " in Europe. On the other hand, however generous it may have been, at an ideational or symbolic level, this proposal could only have been accepted if it would also respond to the national interests of the states concerned, and would comply – or at least would not contravene – with their reconstruction programmes after the war. From a French perspective, access to German resources and the German market was vital, and in Britain's absence from the equation, France could structure future integration from a position of leadership and in a manner that would ensure its primacy on the continent. On the other hand, Germany understood that the plan had the potential to remove the discriminatory limitations that had been imposed on it and, although it gave up some economic advantages, it acquired others, politically. With its willingness to work with Western Europe, Germany regained its legitimacy as a democratic state and was accepted as an equal partner in a future integrated Europe, which, perhaps paradoxically, will allow it to regain its economic and political independence.

In *Chapter 7*, dedicated to conclusions, we showed that the end of the Second World War was the right time for the ideal of European unity to finally come to fruition. The decision-makers of the time understood that the perpetuation of the disjunctive model in approaching relations between states, which for centuries had generated a permanent state of confrontation in Europe, had to be stopped, and the integrative solution appeared as the only viable option for the installation and maintenance of lasting peace on the continent. We have concluded that, during the Cold War, peace was one of

the engines that pushed Western Europe towards a deeper model of integration, motivated, among other things, by the need for prosperity, in an increasingly globalised economy, and by the awareness of Europe's special status in the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. By identifying the lessons learned by the European decision-makers over the past 70 years, we have established that maintaining peace on the continent is one of the definite successes of the integration process begun at the end of the Second World War, but that this essential dimension, the foundation for all the other benefits of integration, has, along the way, come to be seen by newer generations as a problem solved. From this perspective, we have shown that the Eurosceptic tendencies that have emerged at the level of societies generate phenomena that seemed long forgotten – the resurgence of nationalist or radical sovereignist ideas; the polarization of some "anti" views by charismatic leaders tempted to adopt populist positions; the re-emergence of authoritarian regimes – which describe a scenario easily recognizable in history. Finally, we have concluded that all the benefits that exist today at the level of the government, of society, of the individual, as a result of the integration process would not have been possible without the success of imposing and maintaining a lasting peace on the continent, as a direct result of the categorical rejection of the destructive potential of war.

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In 2012, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the European Union, and the decision was motivated by the fact that "the Union and its forerunners have for over six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe"¹⁵. Of course, even if this motivation is perfectly accurate, it only fragmentarily captures the significance of fulfilling the ideal pursued for centuries in Europe – the continental peace, which was finally installed at the end of the Second World War.

One may assert that the process of European integration has been and still is interconnected with the success of maintaining peace on the continent, with the two components of this dichotomy influencing and augmenting each other. On the other hand, although the concrete results are obvious, it is also necessary to consider the political

¹⁵ <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2012/press-release>, 15 April 2021.

reasons and intentions that led to the establishment of this peace, as well as at least an attempt to define the concept, apart from the mere absence of war, and, to this regard, one must consider three aspects: 1. the success of the post-war reconciliation of European states, especially France and Germany, the "traditional enemies"; 2. the decisive contribution of the European Union's forerunners to the maintenance of peace on the continent during the Cold War; 3. the social peace achieved within the Member States.

The process of European integration requires maintaining a proper climate for development, which can only be ensured through stability and lack of conflict, and thus peace and security. These objectives remain constant in the case of the European Union and, as has been proven, have been and are still being achieved through a science of compromise, based on the continuous development of trust between Member States and on the coherence between appearance and essence in their relations. Between this way of approaching international relations and the one before 1945 there is a really colossal difference.

The European project was started with the objective of maintaining peace and the European institutions that we know today have been built on this foundation. When Robert Schuman proposed the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community on 9 May 1950, his stated belief was that the new institution would make war impossible, by eliminating the traditional opposition between France and Germany, which would jointly manage the resources of the two economic sectors essential to the war industry. Economic cooperation was therefore only a means to achieving the ultimate objective of denying any future wars.

Moreover, the peace motif accompanies the history of European unity as a red thread, from the beginning to the present day, and the treaties that have punctuated the various stages of integration – including Maastricht and Lisbon – do not forget to mention it among the fundamental objectives assumed. Therefore, its reiteration is still needed, if only as a reminder to the generations of today or of tomorrow. On the other hand, one cannot deny that, beyond this objective, there have been and there still are many other motivations for the success of the integration process.

Research over the past 30 years constantly points out that the national interests of states are and must be one of the factors that have influenced this process. The Schuman

Declaration is a classic example, from this perspective: as we have pointed out, the French foreign minister's plan arose out of inspiration, but also out of desperation, after all the other initiatives to solve the German problem, through its political "containment", had failed. The economic interests of the states are always intertwined with their – let's say – motivations of a geopolitical nature, and, in the case of France, since the initiatives to modernise their own economy had failed to produce the intended effects – that is to say, to generate the conditions by which Germany could be kept in check, unable to reach its potential and thus become the predominant economic force in Europe –, the French turned to the only other viable solution.

Furthermore, this change in French optics was also motivated by the attitudes of the two other Western Allies, the United Kingdom and the United States, who wanted to restore West Germany's economy as quickly as possible, equally pursuing their own interests. Moreover, with the obvious "warming" of the Cold War – a few weeks after the Schuman Declaration, the Korean War broke out – for London and Washington, the communist threat appeared closer than the possible future resurgence of the former enemy. In these circumstances, France could not afford to fall behind the Anglo-American tandem, and its stubbornness in pursuing its initial policy on the German issue would have disadvantaged it in the long run. There is no doubt that the Schuman Declaration had among its objectives the achievement and maintenance of peace on the continent – in particular by limiting Germany's capabilities –, but the proposed integrative solution was also a new and innovative instrument, which, for France, had the very promising potential of assuring its prominence in the new post-war Western order.

Later on, during the Cold War, peace was one of the engines that pushed Western Europe towards a deeper model of integration, motivated, among other things, by the need for prosperity, in an increasingly globalized economy, and by the awareness of Western Europe's special status in the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. From this perspective, a major failure of the integration process – including today – concerns the creation of a common security structure. The European Defence Community, the most important project of the six signatory members of the Treaty of Paris for the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community, has not gone beyond the negotiation phase. However, the potential security vacuum was covered

by the inclusion in NATO of the Federal Republic of Germany – which also involved its rearmament – a compromise also accepted by France. Under the North Atlantic security umbrella, Western Europe could focus its efforts in other directions, which would allow it an unprecedented economic development.

Clearly, all these efforts would not have succeeded without the discernment, tact and skill of the policy makers and officials of the Member States, who understood that, in this new paradigm, cooperation on a trust-based basis is for the benefit of all parties involved, and that joint European projects must be subordinated to the national interest. Of course, there was not always consensus or, often, consensus followed after long and tiring negotiations, in which, perhaps paradoxically, Germany was not the disruptive element in European relations. In the 1960s, for example, France, under the presidency of General De Gaulle, was the most blunt factor in this model of compromise-based cooperation, and more than once adopted, in relation to other European partners, an inflexible policy that marked a temporary worsening of relations between member states, culminating in the two unilateral refusals (in 1963 and 1967) to accept Britain's admission to the European Communities. Relatively recent research shows, however, that De Gaulle juggled vetos and ultimatums in order to rather pursue tactical objectives in France's interest, but that he was sufficiently aware of the advantages of the European integration process for his country and therefore never allowed dissensions to lead to a definitive fracture.¹⁶ Therefore, through a proper understanding of the times, through the awareness of possible consequences and, not infrequently, through hard-learned patience, integrative Europe has overcome these moments, although, even then, there were many eager to predict its end.

For all the certainties we have today with regard to the role of the European Union and its forerunners in maintaining a climate conducive to development on the European continent, the course of integration has been more than sinuous. If war and its effects are the main cause for the chosen integrative solution, as the only solution for maintaining peace on the continent – a causal association that can be traced back over the last

¹⁶ See, for example, Laurent Warlouzet, *Le choix de la CEE par la France: L'Europe économique en débat de Mendès France à de Gaulle (1955-1969)*, Institut de la gestion publique et du développement économique, Comité pour l'histoire économique et financière de la France, Paris, 2011, passim.

millennium –, the post-war years provided, for the first time, the necessary and sufficient conditions for its – hopefully – definitive achievement.

On the other hand, if maintaining peace was the main reason for adopting the integrative solution, the defining role that the European Union was to acquire for today's societies could not be envisaged at that time – it was at most an ideal, a hope to be pursued. In the 1950s and 1960s, there were only signals for the potential significance of the European Communities, which began to coalesce later, so that, with the dissolution of the communist bloc and the detention between East and West, the European Union would acquire the monopoly for the cooperation in Europe that it holds today. Paradoxically, if the beginnings of the integrative process coincide with the beginning of the Cold War, its conclusion marks a remarkable focus of energies, both in the West and in the East, in the sense of transforming the European project into the common ideal of all European nations. On the other hand, with the increase in the number of Member States, consensus becomes all the more difficult to achieve, and this implies additional vulnerabilities. However, as has been noted by some authors, the European Union is showing astonishing resilience, also in the sense that it has a position from which it can transform in its own interest the external impulses that generate change¹⁷. This ability stems less from the idealism of the Member States, than from the huge inertia of the European system of institutions, with all the interdependencies, at different levels, that it entails. From this point of view, the European Union is equally a monolith resistant to systemic change, but also very vulnerable to cumulative crisis – an association of economic and humanitarian problems, military tensions, cascading Exits, etc. In such a scenario, the only way to resist would be to isolate each of the problems and treat them separately, which becomes a difficult operation with the existing interdependencies.

Until such an undesired scenario and its possible solutions, the areas where the European Union has made a decisive contribution throughout its historical journey must not be forgotten. Firstly, the establishment and maintenance of peace on the continent are undoubtedly central arguments for the integration process begun at the end of the Second World War and one of the definite successes that can be attributed to it. Along the way,

¹⁷ Ulrich Bröckling, *Gute Hirten führen sanft. Über Menschenregierungskünste*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 2017, p. 113-139.

somehow naturally, this essential dimension, the foundation for all the other benefits of integration, has come to be seen as a problem solved and has lost value for newer generations. However, today's tensions, some in close proximity to the borders of the European Union, constantly remind us how precious peace is and how easily it can be lost.

Secondly, the achievement of peace has led to an unprecedented level of prosperity for societies engaged in the integration process. As yet another objective assumed in the post-war context, the restoration of states, involved sustained efforts on their part, it is no wonder that integration initially had an economic motivation and the results recorded in the first post-war decades were better than expected. Over time, this prosperity has come to be one of the best indicators for the success of the integrative project. On the other hand, one of the biggest concerns today for European citizens is the economic situation: according to Eurobarometer 93, published in August 2020, concern about the economic situation has increased by 10% since autumn 2019.¹⁸

Thirdly, the European Union has assumed a set of common values considered essential for the integrative project, but with a focus on each individual: the promotion of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, inclusion, transparency of decision-making, etc. However, for an actor with influence on the world stage, the need to compromise or make concessions to political actors not aligned with the same values is obvious – and this ambivalence, although dictated by a necessary *realpolitik*, in certain instances, contributes to the way in which the Union is perceived at the level of each citizen. If, for a long time, most Europeans have regarded integration as a process unrelated to everyone's daily life, and thus showing limited interest in it, since the 1990s and, especially after 2000, the effects of the decisions made at European level have started to be increasingly visible at individual level, which has also marked a polarisation of the pros and cons. As the promise of prosperity and freedoms associated with the

¹⁸ See *Public opinion in the European Union, Summer 2020, Standard Eurobarometer 93*, mai ales Secțiunea C: *The main concerns at European level. The economic situation is becoming by far the most important concern at European Union level*, at <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinionmobile/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/surveyKy/2262>, 19.04.2021.

European project may sometimes seem difficult to keep, more or less radical resistance movements to the political and social transformations involved by integration have appeared in many Member States. Thus, there are only few in which there is no well-represented Eurosceptic party, even if the opponents to European integration still remain a minority. Especially since the 2000s, based on a perception that is gaining ground – that decision-making at European level is controlled by faceless "Eurocrats" who adopt solutions, even technocratic ones, without the necessary transparency –, Euroscepticism is settling into increasingly stable positions in societies, generating phenomena that seemed long outdated: the resurgence of nationalist or radical ideas; polarization of "anti" views by charismatic leaders tempted by populism; re-emergence of authoritarian regimes, etc. Of course, these phenomena are not limited to Europe, but apparently are part of a global trend, as a counter reaction to some trends, considered ultra-progressive, initiated or supported, primarily, across the Atlantic.

Against this background, debates about the future of the European project, including the possibility of its disintegration, are all the more necessary as there is the precedent of the United Kingdom. Leaving aside the deeply symbolic significance of Brexit, the possible major crisis for the European project has not yet materialised. On the other hand, a systemic crisis can be announced by the conscious choice of certain Member States to contradict the validity of the legal system or legal mechanisms on which the Union operates. We are, of course, referring to the Viktor Orbán government's decision in September 2017 to ignore the European Court of Justice's decision on refugees. This case, which is part of a longer line of decisions of Budapest that were contrary not only to the spirit of the European Union, may indicate a systemic problem or, paradoxically, may lead to a strengthening of the supranational level in response to the illiberal tendencies that manifest at the level of the Member States. It would not be the first time that the European Union has responded to a crisis – see the example of the monetary union – through a deeper integration.

On the other hand, opinion polls in recent years still show high support for the European project, at the level of individuals, especially in terms of the benefits that respondents identify for their living standards¹⁹. The issue of support, participation and

¹⁹ Ibidem.

control over the integration process by the citizens of the Member States, through institutions and procedures that they accept and legitimise through democratic mechanisms, is now more important than ever. Equally, the participation of citizens in decision-making and the transparency of the process are not only desiderata of a democratic society of the 21st century, but are essential for its functioning.

European integration has always meant more than cooperation, be it close, between Member States. National interests have shaped the history of the European Union over time, but they are only slightly responsible for how the integration process has evolved. Rather, the states themselves have transformed, through the links that have been created between them, into a kind of post-national states, willing to give up some of their sovereignty in favour of integration. This does not mean that all states have acted in the same way or that the results are the same everywhere – as there are major differences between individual state structures and, above all, in the mentalities of societies.

Even though the European Union today faces enough internal problems that need to be addressed, in its relations with other major global players it continues to maintain a leading role, primarily from an economic point of view. For a long time, at least during the Cold War, interactions with other regions of the globe were of only secondary importance, while the European Community assumed a self-referential attitude, in its economic policies, and adapted to the trends in Washington, in its foreign policy. Today, the European Union, through its Common Trade Policy, with its strong supranational elements, manages economic relations at Community level and with third parties, and benefits from the ascendancy of the group's strength.

All these gradual pretences that have taken place over the last 70 years, all the benefits that are felt at the level of the state, of society, of the individual, as a result of the integration process would not have been possible without the success of imposing and maintaining a lasting peace on the continent, as a direct result of the categorical rejection of the destructive potential of war. It would be useful, perhaps, to rewrite the history of the European continent from an irenic perspective – by considering the idea of peace as the "engine" that succeeded in transforming the fragmented, closed and predominantly egocentric society of yesterday into the integrative, open and predominantly altruistic one of today – at least to highlight once again the dichotomy of the two concepts, *peace* and

war, and their interdependencies. Only then can today's Europe – which, from the beginning, has undertaken to maintain peace and strengthen welfare as its main objectives – but, above all, the Europe of tomorrow can be properly understood.

One of the most important lessons in history is that every present is fragile and, from this perspective, every future is possible – sometimes even the least likely. From the perspective of the past, today's present is only one of the possible futures to which each generation is called to contribute. In other words, the European project, the European unity, as it appears to us today, is revealed to us not necessarily as the end result of a plan put into practice in the smallest details, but as a continuous adaptation and readjustment to the realities of ever-changing present. What remains, however, is the idea that this present can design a more easily predictable future, depending on the lessons we learn from the past.

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Reiterating the specific objectives we assumed at the beginning of our research – 1. The identification and analysis of the causes that led to the creation of a supra-national organism intended implicitly to maintain lasting peace and the beneficial economic, social and security effects obtained as a result of its creation; 2. The proposal and definition of the innovative concept of "ideological equalization" between the democratic Western societies, by which we understand the limiting of the differences in the democratic organization of government in Western Europe, faced with the aggressive affirmation of an ideological formula identified as a common enemy: communism; 3. Identifying and analysing alternative proposals on the management of the resources of Germany and France prior to the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community, we consider that they have been fully achieved.

Also considering that the main objective set at the beginning of our research – namely to demonstrate the causal link between the Second World War and the creation of the European Union, as a successful solution for maintaining lasting peace on the continent – has been achieved, we cannot, however, fail to recognise the inherent difficulty of any attempt to prove the obvious. On the other hand, in the course of our research, we have always leaned on the idea that, as has happened so many times in history, what is obvious is not always appreciated as such – by leaders, by societies, by

individuals – and that, from time to time, it is necessary for the mechanisms of palpability to be also revealed.

Beyond this only apparently positive approach, our research is an analytical endeavor focused on a critical period in the history of Europe, which bears its consequences to this day. Equally, our approach is a plea for conciliation, for consensus, for peace – in a world that increasingly demonstrates that it has forgotten the consequences of war – rooted in our adamant belief that history contains enough lessons to demonstrate its status of *magistra vitae*, while we, the today's living people, have nothing more to do but to be his disciples.