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## **A European Lesson on Integration**

Sebastian Morales



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University of Miami  
1300 Campo Sano Building, 220C  
Coral Gables, FL 33124-2231  
Phone: 305-284-3266  
Fax: (305) 284 4406  
Web: [www.miami.edu/eucenter](http://www.miami.edu/eucenter)

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# A European Lesson on Integration

Sebastian Morales\*

*“People only accept change when they are faced with necessity, and only recognize necessity when a crisis is upon them. Make men work together, show them that beyond their differences and geographical boundaries there lies a common interest.” - Jean Monnet, 1979*

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

“One does not inhabit a country; one inhabits a language. That is our country, our fatherland - and no other.”<sup>2</sup> Can you unify a people composed of different ethnic groups, many of whom cannot communicate between each other? The EU is, at least, trying. How to foster integration in any region is a difficult task. The EU stands as the bastion of regional integration, something regions with more unifying characteristics have been unable to replicate. The EU, however, may have succeeded as a combination of a necessity for integration and the establishment of complex and ambitious institutions seize it.

### I. Background

An example of such institutions is the European Parliament (EP). According to John McCormick, the EP election is the second largest democratic election in the world, and as of 2019, it has achieved a voter turnout of about 50%.<sup>3</sup> Due to its multiple political groups and large voting pool, members have to exert as a joint entity, one that please diverse groups to form a majority. The EP was the first EU institution to react to the COVID-19 crisis, and this was pushed upon by the democratic accountability it was bestowed.<sup>4</sup> The turnout might not be as high as in other countries, but 50% is a galaxy apart from 0%. No other supranational entity in modern history has ever bestowed the election of its members directly on the populace. In a 2019 interview, Kathleen McNamara called to attention that when a people feel they share a destiny, stability would prevail. McNamara also stated that the EU’s identity building process was based on ideals such as freedom and democracy, as opposed to just culture and ethnicity.<sup>5</sup> Allowing the people to directly participate can certainly push this idea of a shared destiny, something we do not see in NAFTA, MERCOSUR, the Arab League, and similar entities being as well implemented; but the EU does not stop there.

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\* Sebastian Morales is a Junior at the University of Miami, with majors in International Studies and Journalism. Originally from Venezuela, Sebastian’s interests aim attention at the EU’s take on transborder governance and social economic policy.

<sup>2</sup> Cioran, Emil, *Anathemas and Admirations*, 1986.

<sup>3</sup> McCormick, John, *European Union Politics 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, 2020

<sup>4</sup> Csernaton, Raluca, and Lațici, Tania, *Empowering the European Parliament: Toward More Accountability on Security and Defense*, 2020

<sup>5</sup> McNamara, Kathleen, 2019 Interview, obtained from the Council of Foreign Relations Website.

An example of another key, yet different institution, is the EU Council. The EU Council focuses on making key strategic decisions, as well as formulating EU foreign policy.<sup>6</sup> It consists of the heads of state of each member state, that would be only 27 people with the retreat of the UK. Compared to the over 700 members of the Parliament, the EU Council would surely behave like a different animal. The sovereigns together in the Council played a key role in the adoption of the Euro, as well as the initiation of every EU treaty. The Council is also much more apt to create a general agenda for the other EU institutions. Members would generally represent the will of the majority of their country's populace, while being a recognizable face subject to much greater scrutiny and responsibility in the public eye.

## II. Analysis

A pillar issue faced by post-WWII Europe and consequently, a reason for the establishment of a union, was the lack of trust between nations despite the urgent need for future peace and economic reconstruction.<sup>7</sup> Europeans from 1945 on were “fed up,” in the more colloquial connotation, with conflict. As nations tried to get themselves back up, in part thanks to the help of the US and the Marshall Plan, it was rather logical that a trade union could help reconstruction. The Coal and Steel community addressed economic prosperity between member countries as well as created interdependency, lowering inequality between parties and thus, prospects of conflict. Nowadays, it seems people agree that establishing a union was the right call. For example, “across 10 European nations recently surveyed by Pew Research Center, a median of 74% say the EU promotes peace, and most also think it promotes democratic values and prosperity.”<sup>8</sup> Post-War Europe knows better than any of its counterparts what the dangers of antagonizing and inequality between nations can materialize.

A fundamental part to the EU's ability to contain sources of conflict could be its cohesion policy. “Identity group inequality is a significant cause of conflict.”<sup>9</sup> Dr. Mogleiv does note that nowadays economic inequality is not a big cause of conflict. However, it might be worth keeping in mind that socioeconomic status often is part of identity and make identity groups that find themselves oppressed also subject to economic disparity. McCormick defines cohesion policy as “policy aimed at redistributing wealth and creating new opportunities in poorer parts of the EU with the goal of closing the income gap.”<sup>10</sup> The EU has a wide array of mechanisms from investment banks to specialized institutions and foundations that study and make normative diagnoses regarding inequality, of all kinds, in the region. The result is not perfect, it does not benefit citizens across different geographical regions and socioeconomic statuses evenly; but countries such as Malta<sup>11</sup> and parts of Western Europe have been able to reap the benefits. It is widely known how important the newer Western European members are, especially with the departure of the UK. One does not need to look too far to see the effects of economic and infrastructural disparity. The Middle East experiences high levels of disparity between nations

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<sup>6</sup> McCormick, John.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Fagan M., Fetterolf J., Wike R., *Europeans Credit EU With Promoting Peace and Prosperity, but Say Brussels Is Out of Touch With Its Citizens*, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Mogleiv Nygård, Håvard, *Inequality and conflict—some good news*, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> McCormick, John, pg. 364.

<sup>11</sup> Author not noted, EU's Cohesion Policy delivers growth and prosperity to Malta, Times of Malta, Nov. 4, 2020.

and the people inside the nations, ultimately contributing to the creation of one of the most destabilized regions despite their human capital and natural resources, oil reserves in particular.

Other regions, such as the Americas, have not been nearly as successful in regional integration with or without the help of supranational entities. The MERCOSUR economies, for example, make up the world's 5<sup>th</sup> largest market.<sup>12</sup> Going North, the CAFTA-DR agreement, which includes countries in Central America and the Dominican Republic, has the US, the nation in the world with the highest GDP, as a member. Both organizations enjoy some success; CAFTA-DR has increased trade among the member nations<sup>13</sup> and MERCOSUR has enough promise that there is a long on-going negotiation with the EU. However, these organizations do not have the presence nor the economic power that the EU has. Yes, part of it is due to the difference in GDP between the nations across both sides of the Atlantic, but there might be more to it; after all, the EU was born from a region ravaged by wars, dictatorships, disease, economic recessions, etc. The EU defined trade broadly, extending it to the people themselves, and committed to create a common market. In 2017, Shanta Devarajan contended that integration, when focused on economic and physical infrastructure, is hard to realize.<sup>14</sup> Yes, economic integration is hard to realize, and by the European example, one is led to believe that further integration needs economics at the base. That might well be the case, but the European example can also suggest that in order to create a successful trade bloc, one must venture into the other areas of integration; integration might be subject to a holistic process. The EU might be the economic powerhouse it is because most citizens can move freely, be it to produce or to spend. A study co-authored by MIT faculty found that "countries switching to democratic rule experience a 20 percent increase in GDP over a 25-year period, compared to what would have happened had they remained authoritarian states."<sup>15</sup> A set of core values, common political and/ or ideological goals can be a determining factor in the economic growth and success of a region; agreeing to trade might not be just enough. According to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, the NAFTA bloc is bigger than the EU.<sup>16</sup> However, NAFTA was believed to be in danger during the Trump administration, and it is evident that many of the member states citizens cannot clearly see the benefits of the organization. Also, NAFTA consists of only 3 nations, 2 of which share a lingua franca.

### III. Conclusion

"The term [identity] (by convention) references mutually constructed and evolving images of self and other" (Katzenstein 1996, 59). This definition might belong to a group that makes the better case for the construction and formulation of a European identity. Some other concepts call to attention social elements such as language and culture. However, this concept focuses on two things, being "mutually constructed" and "evolving." A European identity is such that needs to be built collectively, as Portuguese and Polish ought to consider themselves to be European along the other. And this identity also needs to be flexible and ever evolving, this

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<sup>12</sup> MERCOSUR Website, accessed Nov. 22, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Bush, Zachary, and Murphy, John, CAFTA-DR Notches 10-Year Record of Success, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Devarajan, Shanta, Why is regional integration so elusive?, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Dizikes, Peter, Study: Democracy fosters economic growth, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Office of the United States Trade Representative, NAFTA: A Decade of Success, Accessed Nov 30, 2020.

identity has to provide for whatever changes in language and culture take place in one country or across a multiplicity of them.

Francis Fukuyama warned against the rise of identity politics in his 2018 article, “Against Identity Politics;”<sup>17</sup> however, he did not dismiss identity politics completely. Fukuyama called for a shift from identity based on ethnicity and culture to a creed-based sense of identity. National identities based on values such as freedom, democracy, justice, and the such would foster democracy and progress, Fukuyama suggested. Europe’s path to integration is not, and the EU knows this, one that needs a common mother tongue and shared culture, but one that aligns with constructivists theories of international relations and pushes for a greater union on the basis of ideas. One can only imagine what is possible if the other side of the Atlantic, as well Africa and the East, genuinely strive to integrate. Asia does not quite have language as a unifying feature, but it has got the most populous nations worldwide and many of the fastest growing economies. Emerging and developing nations in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America can significantly benefit from trading with the local economic powerhouses. But, again, this cannot be done halfheartedly. The erosion of borders, along other minimal loses of sovereignty must be made. Some nations, like Venezuela for MERCOSUR, might be forced to wait for democratization before pursuing integration, but the EU did not wait for the Soviet bloc to get started.

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<sup>17</sup> Fukuyama, Francis, Against Identity Politics, 2018, Foreign Affairs.

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