



BOOKS AND CLASSICS

Two vistas on the remaking of Europe: a review essay on two recent books on the history of European integration

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The books reviewed in this article are:

B Leucht, K Seidel, and L Warlouzset (eds), *Reinventing Europe: The History of the European Union from 1945 to the Present* (Bloomsbury Academic 2023).

DC Thomas, *The Limits of Europe: Membership Norms and the Contestation of Regional Integration* (Oxford University Press 2021).

The first of the two books under review is a textbook. It is a collective enterprise of no fewer than 14 different authors who represent the ‘state-of-the-art’ of the subdiscipline of European integration history. The second book is a monograph by a political scientist. What links the two books is that they both see the EU as a transformative project, one that has enabled Europe to remake itself.

For Daniel C. Thomas, a constructivist scholar whose important book on the *Helsinki Effect* exercised great influence on both historians and IR theorists in the early 2000s,¹ Europe is what its member states make of it. His book is concerned with enlargement and with the norms that have been applied to allow, or disallow, would-be members to join. His central point is that these norms have shifted over time but have consistently been decisive, notably by trumping the member states’ worries about the potential impact of a given candidate state on their domestic economies.

For the authors of *Reinventing Europe*, by contrast, ‘Europe’ is essentially coterminous with the supranationalism of the EU project. Though the editors’ introduction states that the book views the European project as ‘an integral part’ of post-war European political, social, and cultural history² and insists that its contributors have striven to insert European integration into ‘the broader narrative of European and global dynamics, including globalization and nationalism, imperialism and decolonization, technological innovations and environmental challenges, and ideological and social upheavals’, the book’s focus is overwhelmingly on the politics, policies and institutions of the EU, and the emergence of the EU as a political instrument capable of regulating, harmonizing, and even superseding its member states. As their book’s title suggests, they regard the EU as Europe’s reinvention.

¹DC Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton University Press 2001).

²B Leucht, K Seidel, and L Warlouzset (eds), *Reinventing Europe: The History of the European Union from 1945 to the Present* (Bloomsbury Academic 2023) 2.

Reinventing Europe's tight focus on supranationalism does not necessarily make it a bad book, of course. The book is organized in three parts. Part 1 is a chronological history of European integration in four chapters that deal with 1945–58, 1958–68, 1969–92, and 1993–2021. The latter two chapters are a gallop across a vast informational steppe, and one wonders whether the editors ever contemplated five chronological chapters, not four. Part 2 deals with 'Institutions and Policies'. Specifically, there is a chapter on the European Commission, on the Court of Justice, and one on 'empowering the talking shop', ie the European Parliament. There is no chapter on the European Council: a striking omission. There are five chapters on Europe's policies that deal respectively with the single market, the CAP, EMU, consumer and environmental protection, social policy and migration. The lack of a chapter on foreign and defence policy, which of course would have required a more 'statist' perspective, stands out like a sore thumb. There is also no attempt to outline what the EU *doesn't* do, and hence to remind the reader that the EU remains an organization of European states that still do quite a lot of things for their citizens. Not everything is decided in Brussels.

Part 3 deals with 'themes and geographical spaces'. Here the choice of topics struck me as being author-generated, not consciously planned; chapters deal with the 'ideas and movements' that have promoted 'Europe', with the European Union in international politics and trade, a 'global power in the making?', with Eastern Europe in the history of European integration, with the Franco-German relationship, with Britain and the European project, with Euroscepticism and opposition to the EU, and with interpretations of European integration history – in short, with the principal themes of the historiography.

The editors' solicitude for the book's intended readership – university students, obviously – and for the colleagues who will teach it, is evident. *Reinventing Europe* is lavishly illustrated with photographs, tables, and timelines and there are some 17 'boxes' that give short biographical details of key figures, or passages from important documents. Some of the photographs are memorable: one of Simone Veil³ perhaps wins the prize for best picture, though it is rivalled by a portrait of Jacques Delors addressing the European Parliament just two pages later. Each chapter finishes with 'key questions' to stimulate class discussion (in some chapters rather perfunctory, in others insightful) and helpful suggestions for further reading. Despite the book's structure there is little overlap between the chapters.

The quality of the individual chapters is mixed. I am not going to sort the chapters into sheep and goats here, but some authors made the transition from writing scholarly articles to instructing the intelligent nineteen-year-old with more success than others. Laurent Warlouzet's chapter on 'The construction of a single market: Liberalization and its regulation', which argues that 'the market became the main medium for building Europe',⁴ is very sound. It is not easy to explain the economic logic of the European project, but Warlouzet clearly thought very hard about how to communicate his material to non-experts. Bill Davies' chapter on the 'Court of Justice of the European Union and Integration through Law' is outstanding. Its thesis, that the 'CJEU has been a key motor driving European integration by locking in the legal obligations imposed by the European institutions and enabling European citizens to use rights granted by EU law'⁵ is hardly original, but the chapter is a fine introduction for those who will be less familiar with its thesis than readers of this journal. Katja Seidel's chapter on the CAP makes it both interesting and comprehensible while advancing the serious historical argument that the CAP's protectionism ultimately derives from 'path dependency'. All the member states (though *not* Britain and therein lies a tale) have always been anxious to protect their farmers: the CAP in effect Europeanized this historically rooted policy preference.

³*Ibid.*, 56.

⁴*Ibid.*, 164.

⁵*Ibid.*, 124.

No chapter discusses the ‘democratic deficit’ or even, more broadly, the ‘European project and democracy’. Yet without the democratization of Europe’s nation states the creation of the EU would have been unthinkable. Such a chapter would also have remedied the book’s principal geographical weakness: the paucity of discussion of southern Europe. This book is European integration with the Mediterranean all but left out. Alcide De Gasperi, Mário Soares and Konstantinos Karamanlis seemingly played no role in the European project’s post-war history. Felipe González is mentioned in passing,⁶ but the role of Europe in the democratization of Spain surely deserved more space. Indeed, enlargement to newly democratic Greece, Portugal and Spain is dismissed in three short paragraphs.⁷ Turkey is mentioned *once* in the whole book,⁸ despite the complexity of its relationship with the EEC from the mid-1960s onwards. With three exceptions the book’s contributors all hail from North-West Europe and this fact has manifestly skewed the book’s content and scope.

The excellent chapter on enlargement (Ferencz Laczó and Vera Ščepanović) to the new democracies of central and eastern Europe is an important counterbalance to this rather traditional geographical focus, but it is not important for this reason only. Its conclusion is worth quoting at length:

Eastern Europe has contributed in crucial, though often indirect, ways to the evolution of the EU as it is today: as a rival during the Cold War, offering an ideological alternative against which to shape one’s politics; as an eager pupil during its post-Communist transformation, forcing the EU to clarify its own positions and values; as an experimental field to test out new ideas and radical reforms; and as an internal other in more recent years, holding up a mirror, or rather a mocking glass, to the buried, but undead dark sides and prejudices of the West.⁹

This passage is a reminder that the peoples of central Europe regarded themselves as essential to European identity even (indeed, especially) when they were behind the Iron Curtain and a warning that West Europeans should not be too certain that Europe, including the Carolingian core, has permanently turned over a cosmopolitan leaf. It is difficult for central Europeans to forget the dark side of the European spirit because its ghosts are still haunting them (or are a more recent memory).

For West Europeans, the European project represented a fresh start, morally, after the horrors of Nazi-Fascism: the crushing of political pluralism, the persecution of Europe’s Jews and other minorities, willing collaboration with evil in the Salò Republic and Vichy. The European project has from the outset been identified with the best of what ‘Europe’ can achieve. It is the political embodiment of her ‘higher self’, so to speak – a Kantian triumph for reason over emotion/prejudice/power politics/nationalism. The contributors to *Reinventing Europe* unquestionably identify with this narrative.

Rightly. The European project undeniably has contributed towards exorcising Europe’s ghosts. It has arguably redeemed Europe – at any rate in the eyes of Europeans; Africans and Asians may be less convinced. But its success has seemingly convinced this book’s authors (most of whom came of age academically during the mood of ‘EU-phoria’ in the late 1990s and early 2000s) that the existence of the EU represents a secular transformation of Europe for the better. I have quoted elsewhere the Sovietologist Leo Labeledz’s remark that a feeling for the ‘transitoriness of things in human history’ is ‘the mark of true historical sensibility’ and it is perhaps this sensibility that is

⁶*Ibid.*, 163.

⁷*Ibid.*, 272–3.

⁸*Ibid.*, 70.

⁹*Ibid.*, 296.

lacking in this book.¹⁰ Though I am not decrying the contributors' professional skill, there is no doubt that the book emits a palpable complacency about the historical status of the European project, and of its permanence.

It is worth exploring why the book gives this impression. I think, ultimately, that the authors of this book are insiders not outsiders. They are adepts of the labyrinthine Brussels policy making process, as well as believers in the European project's goals. They acknowledge some weaknesses (one contributor timidly confesses that 'even the EP is not immune to (sic) criticism') but anxiously explain away flaws. The notion that the EU today resembles nothing so much as First Republic Italy writ large is an alien one for the contributors to this volume – as it is for most scholars of European Studies. But that is what it has become: a complex consociational political system where the institutions have become detached from the *paese reale*. Like the federal government in Washington DC, the EU has lost touch with the common people, to use an old-fashioned phrase.

Indeed, it never has been close to them. For decades the EC/EU was a technocratic intergovernmental organisation handling arcane subjects like the CAP, trade negotiations, regional development, and the harmonisation of standards. Most citizens of the member states didn't care how it worked, so long as the economic benefits accruing from the membership outweighed the relatively small losses of sovereignty involved. Public opinion 'consented tacitly to European integration', one contributor says approvingly.¹¹ The single market only added to the European project's appeal. Unless you were British, you could get in your car and drive without passport controls. And even if you were British, you could sell your products across borders with few restrictions.

The so-called permissive consensus towards the EU has altered since the 1990s. Since the ratification of the EU Treaty, the peoples of the member states have also been *citizens* of the EU. It is their *duty* to care about, and have an opinion on, what the EU does. Since Maastricht, which represented a significant shift of sovereign power from the member states to the new EU's institutions, notably the nascent ECB, the EU has acquired decision-making power in a wide range of areas and the Union has expanded substantially in size. In the forthright words of Christopher Bickerton:

The process of European integration, since the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, has been about political elites seeking legitimacy in their relations with one another, rather than in their relations with their own, increasingly disgruntled electorates . . . EU integration entrenches the power of executives at the expense of legislatures, and governments at the expense of citizens.¹²

It is small wonder therefore that many EU citizens are increasingly expressing their contrariness and that political parties have emerged to channel and magnify their dissent. The evolution of the European project has increasingly been perceived as a 'European *disruption* of the nation state' by millions of ordinary people, not an act of transformation. Major changes to institutions or markets, or regulative frameworks, create large constituencies of people (farmers, for instance) who lose out, or who simply prefer old ways of doing things, or who can't understand why people from faraway countries of which they know nothing should make important decisions

¹⁰M Gilbert, 'Narrating the Process: Questioning the Progressive Story of European Integration' 46 (2008) *Journal of Common Market Studies* 641 at 656.

¹¹Leucht et al (n 2) 337.

¹²C Bickerton and L Jones, 'The EU's Democratic Deficit: Why Brexit is essential for restoring Popular Sovereignty', *Brave New Europe*, 20 July 2018, available at <<https://braveneweuropa.com/christopher-bickerton-and-lee-jones-the-eus-democratic-deficit-why-brexit-is-essential-for-restoring-popular-sovereignty>> accessed 7 July 2024.

on their behalf. When the EU expanded its size and competences and made its peoples citizens, then the process of integration was bound to become more political and less technocratic.

I am writing these words in the immediate aftermath of the 2024 European elections. All over Europe, commentators are fretting over the advance of 'sovereignist' forces of the 'far right' – some, indeed, even insinuate that scepticism towards the EU is indicative of far-right political beliefs. But so long as the insurgents respect democratic norms (in some countries admittedly a big if), there is no problem. It merely means that supporters of the EU will have to promote Europe's cause harder and explain the advantages that EU membership brings. They will have to knock on doors, hand out leaflets, and talk the language of ordinary people, not of comitology, or of professors.¹³ Political projects wither on the vine if they cannot demonstrate that they add value to most people's lives. The onus is on supporters of the EU to *make* the European project a permanent part of European life, and not just take for granted that it is.

Reinventing Europe dedicates a single chapter to opposition to Europe, by Carine Germond. Her chapter, 'Integrating or breaking up Europe: Euroscepticism or opposition to Europe', acknowledges that disgruntled electorates are choosing right-wing anti – EU parties at the polls. She provides an exhaustive list of these parties and the various transnational political groups into which they have coalesced (Table 18, which lists them, occupies three pages), though – the Mediterranean again – she seems a bit shaky on what Salvini's *Lega* is and why it represented such a break from the Lega Nord.¹⁴ She even admits that the intensification of the European project since Maastricht is one of the principal causes of public discontent with the EU. She agrees that the Commission is regarded as a 'technocratic, opaque, unelected and dissipative body', accuses national governments of using the EU as a scapegoat for national problems, attacks the 'unbridled liberalism' of the Internal Market for having created tiers of 'winners and losers' and recognizes that the people fear that the states will lose their 'unique national character'. She also darkly warns that third countries – she means Russia, but she should also look at the output of some right-wing American thinktanks – 'might dislike the EU's attempt to disseminate its shared values'.¹⁵ Earlier in the chapter, she admits that the rise of Euroscepticism has also been fuelled by 'enlargement fatigue' and worries within the smaller member states that they are losing influence.

This list of causes amounts to a wide-ranging examination of the EU's malaise, though Germond doesn't use that word. The chapter unfortunately peters out in a murky exhortation for a compromise to be found with more progressive Eurosceptics that will make the EU 'closer to EU citizens, more democratic and more social or, on the contrary, more liberal and more respectful of national sovereignty. Only time will tell how its identity will evolve with a new crises or popular movement' (sic).¹⁶ At bottom, Germond is dodging the unpalatable notion that the *concept* of advanced integration in supranational institutions is politically divisive.

The experience of the United Kingdom suggests that it is. The only shortcoming of an otherwise impressive chapter called 'In or Out? Britain and the European Project' by Mathias Haeussler, is that the author does not explore the extent to which political principle has been crucial for the success of Brexit. Haeussler firmly rejects the 'idea that Britain has been negatively predisposed towards European integration, or that Brexit was the seemingly inevitable result of the country's difficult role inside the European Communities'.¹⁷ British *governments* certainly were not negatively disposed (until 2017), though they were often at odds with majority opinion within

¹³During lockdown I was asked by the EPP to give my opinions on the state of the EU. I accordingly consulted over Zoom with two party functionaries for an hour. They were taken aback when I suggested that they might do better to talk with my greengrocer: the idea clearly had never occurred to them.

¹⁴M Brunazzo and M Gilbert, 'Insurgents Against Brussels: Euroscepticism and the Right-wing Populist Turn of the Lega Nord Since 2013' 22 (2017) *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 624.

¹⁵All quotations from Leucht et al (n 2) 350.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 350–1.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 317–8.

the EC/EU and rarely showed much team spirit. What this otherwise stimulating chapter ignores is the strength and the *sophistication* of the opposition evoked from the outset in the British body politic by membership of the Community. This opposition came from both sides of the House. Left-wing intellectuals such as Douglas Jay and Michael Foot made a common cause with Enoch Powell on the right. The ideas of Powell, especially, were mainstreamed by the popular press – above all, the *Daily Mail* – from the 1990s onwards and provided the Brexiters of 2016–19 with intellectual ballast for their campaign.¹⁸

Haeussler asserts instead that the ‘Leave’ victory in 2016 was due to the successful instrumentalisation of ‘wider anti-immigration, anti-elite populist sentiments’ which were projected ‘onto the question of EU membership’.¹⁹ This remark is true up to a point. It is certainly true that Brexit was a populist revolt captained by affluent demagogues (Johnson, Rees-Mogg, Farage) who were economical with the truth (most notoriously in their claim that EU membership was costing the UK £350m per week, which was accurate if one looked at Britain’s *gross* contribution in 2015 (£18.9 billion) but false if one factored in contributions from the CAP and the structural funds, and EU funds won by British universities). But Brexit was also about ordinary people voicing their unease with the transfer of political decision-making from the House of Commons (whose members are directly accountable to them) to airconditioned rooms in Brussels. The slogan ‘take back control’ touched a chord with many citizens who voted in favour of ‘Leave’ in the Referendum and with the millions who voted again in December 2019 to ‘get Brexit done’.²⁰ Surveys of voters in the referendum consistently ranked concerns about sovereignty high, whereas concerns about high immigration, which many, not just Haeussler, single out as the principal cause of the Brexit vote, also had a strong sovereignty component since they were not solely a visceral repudiation of foreigners, but arose from a realization that the British state no longer fully controlled its own borders.

This book underestimates the significance of Brexit for the European project, I think. Magdalena Frennhoff Larsén’s chapter ‘Enlargement, treaty reform and crises, 1993–2021’, gives the British decision to leave the European project less than 500 words in all. These few lines glibly portray Brexit as a ‘setback’ that the EU has overcome.²¹ Levels of public support for the EU increased, continental Eurosceptic parties moderated their rhetoric, as the complications associated with leaving the EU became clear. The British decision to leave ‘certainly served as a wake-up call for the EU and intensified the discussion about the nature and future direction of EU cooperation’.²² This last affirmation is debatable, to put it mildly, but the main problem with such an interpretation of the Brexit saga is the one I mentioned above: it downplays the disruption that the European project has generated within the member states. The chapter limits its discussion of Brexit from a *British* perspective to a mention in passing of a ‘number of failed ratification attempts [of the Withdrawal Bill] on the UK side’,²³ which is a somewhat blasé dismissal of the biggest constitutional crisis in British democracy since 1909.

The same chapter’s description of the Eurozone crisis follows the same self-congratulatory approach towards the EU’s response: it comes quite close to arguing that the crisis was ultimately beneficial because it enabled the EU to improve the Eurozone’s financial architecture. Frennhoff Larsén comments: ‘as so often has been the case in the history of the EU, a crisis highlighted weaknesses in previously agreed policies or structures, and member states responded by pursuing

¹⁸M Gilbert, ‘The Intellectual Origins of Brexit: Enoch Powell, Douglas Jay and the British Dissenting Tradition’ in M Gilbert and D Pasquonucci (eds), *Euroscepticisms: The Historical Roots of a Political Challenge* (Brill 2020) 121.

¹⁹Leucht et al (n 2) 329.

²⁰17.4 million people voted to leave in June 2016 and though Boris Johnson’s Conservatives did not get a majority of the vote in the 2019 general election, they did get more votes, and a slightly higher percentage share of the poll, than Tony Blair and New Labour in May 1997, whose victory was universally regarded as a landslide.

²¹Leucht et al (n 2) 81.

²²*Ibid.*, 82.

²³*Ibid.*, 82.

further integration'.²⁴ Perhaps, but it might have been wiser to avoid the crisis in the first place. The crisis, Frennhoff Larsén explains, developed because the GIPS (Greece–Ireland–Portugal–Spain) ‘accumulated a significant amount of public debt by borrowing extensively from the core countries in the North’.²⁵ In keeping with the rest of the book, this is a very North European perspective. It would be more precise to say that common usage of the euro generated a wave of over-consumption in the GIPS as their interest rates converged towards the lower rates prevailing in Northern Europe. Banks in Germany, the Netherlands, and France lent enthusiastically to property developers in Ireland and Spain and bought the GIPS’ public debt, for, after all, what could possibly go wrong now everybody was in a single currency and playing by the same rigorous rules? Whoops. Such banks were saved from the consequences of their folly by taxpayer-funded bailouts during the bust. The Greek *people’s* bailout by the EU, meanwhile, was accompanied by austerity measures that slashed household income by an average 40 per cent, a salient fact that Frennhoff Larsén conspicuously omits, or perhaps doesn’t know. I shall never forget arriving in Athens in 2012 to find a very large city that was *dark*.

In general, this book would have benefitted from a broader discussion of the *impact* the acceleration of the European project has had on peoples ill-prepared for it, be they Britons with residual dreams of national greatness, and quaint notions that they should be able to hold decision-makers democratically accountable for their actions, or politicians from the GIPS inexplicably unwilling to slash middle class consumption and lose elections. Variable geometry of the kind proposed by Joschka Fischer in his May 2000 Berlin speech on the ‘finality’ of the EU, would have been a better choice for the EU after Maastricht; it will be an important task for future historians to discover why it was limited to ad hoc deals with some member states, rather than becoming an organisational principle. My own instinctive answer is that the statesmen and women of Europe lacked the imagination to envisage any solution other than more supranationalism for everybody to solve the problems they faced. But this might be wrong.

The best way of summing up *Reinventing Europe* is to recall E.H. Carr’s famous mountain metaphor for historical interpretation in *What is History?* The mountain is real, it is massive, it is an objective fact. But the position from which one views it will alter the picture that a sightseer retains. *Reinventing Europe* has many good qualities, and chapters contributed by several of the most able historians currently writing on European integration, but I think it can justly be accused of portraying the mountain of the European project from a single, achingly familiar vista. It would have benefitted from the inclusion of more iconoclastic perspectives.

Daniel C. Thomas’s *The Limits of European Integration* perspective on his subject matter (enlargement) is complicated by the fact that his discussion of the EC/EU’s admission of new members is accompanied by a theoretical argument about how regional political organisations *like* the EU (are there any?) expand their membership (there is even a largely quantitative chapter, which purports to demonstrate the validity of his argument by cross-tab correlations, logistic regression analysis, and qualitative comparative analysis: I skipped). In brief, he contends that the consensus between existing members over a given organization’s ‘prevailing membership norm’ will in most cases define whom they will allow to join. Only states that ‘fit’ can be part of the club, others are blackballed. The predominant ethical/political norms, which may of course alter from time to time, are more important even than geographical proximity, or geopolitical/security motivations, and certainly are more important than the economic impact new members might have on trade patterns, in the decision to admit a new member. At any rate, such has been in the case of the EU; whether all other organizations behave the same way is not really demonstrated.

Thomas, in my opinion, does make a plausible case for suggesting that the enlargement process has been mostly determined by normative consensus, although, like most constructivist scholars,

²⁴*Ibid.*, 79.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 77.

he appears to believe, at any rate in theory, that there are no limits on the power of collectively shared ideas to shape public policy. The boundaries of a regional community such as the EU are ‘determined by the collective imagination of the governments that comprise the community at any given time’,²⁶ Thomas states. Later in the book, he approvingly quotes Kalypso Nicolaidis as saying there ‘is no specific tipping point, no point on the map where we can say: EUness stops’.²⁷ In other words, if Canada were to apply to join the EU, and if the member states were convinced that Canadian membership was consonant with their idea of what the Union stood for at that historical juncture, then Canada, whose adherence would incidentally bring economic advantages to the member states, in theory might well be admitted as a member.

In practice, Thomas rows back from such extremes. He acknowledges that the EU Treaty limits membership to ‘European’ states and that any definition of ‘Europe’ is influenced by commonsense understandings of geography. Morocco, for instance, was rejected as a member in 1987 since it ‘lies clearly beyond the conventional geographic limits of Europe’.²⁸ But that still leaves some intriguing question marks. It is not entirely fantasy-politics to imagine a scenario in which Canada, traumatised by events south of its 3,000-mile border, looked for new political relationship with the EU, nor a post-Putin Russia pleading that its destiny has always lain in the West and that Saint Petersburg, as much as Prague or Paris, is a pinnacle of European civilization. One could surely also imagine a liberal Israel applying to join the EU as part of a bid to restore its tarnished post-Netanyahu reputation, or a more-or-less democratic Tunisia anxious to avoid the fate of Libya and its other neighbours. How would the EU decide upon such applications? It is plausible to suggest that the key variable would be whether future European leaders believed that such states shared the same broad values as the existing members, rather than mechanistically applied criteria of geography, narrow cost/benefit economic analysis, or decisions on the basis of security concerns.

Of course, common honesty requires admitting that a decade from now the EU itself might be a club whose senior members will be striving to shut themselves off from a changing world, and that its membership norms may have become nativist and defensive.

Thomas outlines the ‘evolution’ of the EU’s membership norms in Chapter 3 of the book. In Part 3 (Chapters 5–8) he conducts careful exercises in ‘process tracing’ (which to a historian looks a lot like narration, but so be it) to show how individual cases were handled. In brief, Thomas argues that there have been four normative phases in the history of European integration that have conditioned the way in which the Community’s members have judged aspirants for membership. In the 1950s, the European project was tinged by the Cold War. It perceived itself to be an economic community of non-communist states. In the 1960s, under pressure from the EPA, the EEC’s self-perception changed: possession of democratic parliamentary institutions became a precondition for membership. Between 1970–2005, the EC/EU cast itself as a paladin of human rights. Respect for both democracy and human rights were regarded as indispensable conditions for membership. Since 2005, however, the EU has been a ‘divided community’. Civilizational traits and religious affiliation, euphemistically defined as the ‘absorptive capacity’ of the EU, have emerged as conditions for membership in some member states, notably Austria, Germany, France, and the new member states of Central Europe.

Thomas illustrates this four-stage evolution of norms largely with reference to states from the Mediterranean. Chapter 5, ‘Membership Eligibility in a Europe of Non-Communist States, 1957–1961’ is a striking piece of scholarship. In synthesis it shows that the Cold War stance of Greece, Turkey and Franco’s Spain led the leaders of EEC states, and members of the Commission, strongly to favour their requests for association with the EEC. This was despite their relative

²⁶DC Thomas, *The Limits of Europe: Membership Norms and the Contestation of Regional Integration* (Oxford University Press 2021) 29.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 219.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 107.

economic backwardness and, in the case of Turkey and Spain, political orientation. ‘Let’s draw Greece and Turkey towards the Common Market to consolidate their engagement in the Western world’, suggested German foreign minister Heinrich von Brentano in January 1960.²⁹ A subsequent coup in Ankara did not change this welcoming approach by the member states. In the case of Spain, Thomas shows that by the end of 1961, after several years of extending cautious diplomatic feelers, Franco’s foreign ministry had received ‘multiple indications of various sorts that Spain would be welcome in the EEC and no powerful messages to the contrary’.³⁰

As Chapter 6 of Thomas’ book shows, this openness towards grim men in uniforms was an affront to Europe’s liberals and socialists. Willi Birkelbach, head of the EPA’s socialist group, produced a January 1962 report, on the eve of the Spanish application for associate member status, stating in unequivocal terms that ‘states whose governments do not have democratic legitimacy . . . cannot be expected to be admitted into the circles of the peoples who form the European Communities’.³¹ The EPA’s socialist group also passed a resolution stating that it was ‘categorically opposed to entertaining any request that comes from a dictatorial government . . . the merger of economic interests has no meaning unless it strengthens democracy’.³² As one member of the EPA said in 1962: ‘Europe is not only oranges and tomatoes, coal and steel, cars and furniture. To build it is not only to pursue the abolition of customs barriers or the growth of cultural exchanges. It is also and above all to strive to create a political community’.³³ Ideally, such a community would not have Franco as a member. On 20 February 1962 Birkelbach pointedly asked the institutions in charge of enlargement, the Commission and the member states, whether and why they were even considering a request coming from a state whose ‘political philosophy and practices are in complete opposition to the conception and structures of the European Communities’.³⁴ Spanish exile groups, trade unions and other civil society actors piled in to underline their opposition to allowing a mass murderer’s regime to acquire legitimacy by association with the EEC. The spring and summer of 1962 witnessed heated public debate over the question of Spanish association.

The Member States, especially France and Germany, remained mostly favourable to closer ties with Franco, despite the fuss. But the negative reaction of public opinion tipped the terms of the normative debate. It became clear – this is Thomas’s point – that no consensus remained for deciding membership by merely economic, geographical, and Cold War norms. Spain was a vital part of the European civilization; its expanding economy offered enticing prospects for EEC exporters; it was central to NATO’s southern European strategy. But it *was* a police state and did not look like reforming. It was therefore blackballed.

Turkey was shrewder. Its military leadership sensibly restored democratic government in 1962 and this led to the heyday of EEC–Turkey relations. The economic difficulties posed by Turkish accession were swept aside – ‘we would not thwart a political operation for hazelnuts’, an Italian diplomat said grandly – and the Ankara Treaty (12 September 1963) was quickly signed.³⁵ The Treaty would gradually incorporate Turkey in the Customs Union over a period of 17–21 years, and thereafter would permit freedom of movement. The Treaty envisaged that this lengthy process would culminate in full membership. EU officials went ‘out of their way’, Thomas asserts, to confirm Turkey’s ‘European vocation’.³⁶ Joseph Luns, the then president of the Council of Ministers, on being asked whether Turkey was European, responded ‘here is Asia, but political and economic agreements transcend and even redraw geographic frontiers’.³⁷ Greece, by contrast, had

²⁹*Ibid.*, 126.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 135.

³¹*Ibid.*, 137.

³²*Ibid.*, 138.

³³*Ibid.*, 141.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 141.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 148.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 148.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 149.

its association agreement suspended after the Colonels' coup d'état in April 1967. By then, Thomas writes, the 'normative definition of the EEC as a community of parliamentary democracies had acquired a fully taken-for-granted status . . . European states without 'free institutions' . . . were now indisputably ineligible for EEC membership, regardless of their geographic location or Cold War politics'.³⁸

Enter, on cue, the arch manipulator. Kostantinos Karamanlis took advantage of the EEC's increasingly strong self-identification with human rights and the democratic tradition in the 1970s (epitomized by the EC's role during the Helsinki process, although Thomas barely references his own important work on this topic) to wangle Greece into the Community on generous terms. He did this by framing the accession narrative not around Greece's economic circumstances, or its administrative readiness for membership (both of which were dire), but on the EC's rhetorical stance over democracy. Greece was returning to its ancient heritage under his leadership and should not be prevented from joining the EC by bureaucratic quibbles, or 'purely material issues',³⁹ the wily Greek premier insisted. Thomas shows that critics of Greek membership found themselves unable to say no: it was 'politically incorrect', as we would say nowadays, to raise doubts about the fitness of Greece for immediate membership of the Community. 'It was impossible to exclude Greece, the mother of all democracies, from Europe', reflected Giscard D'Estaing,⁴⁰ though he subsequently defined Greece as 'basically an oriental country'.⁴¹

The truth is that Karamanlis, not Greece, entered Europe. He had figured out how to charm his way in. But then, he was one of the most resourceful statesmen of post-war European history – which is why he deserves a page or two in textbooks of European integration history. In October 1981, the Greeks elected a left-wing populist, Andreas Papandreou, whose PASOK movement defeated the New Democracy Party, now led by Georgios Rallis. 'Andreas', as he was familiarly known, had a different narrative, a Eurosceptic one that depicted Greece as a victim of the Cold War mindset in the West.⁴² But by then Greece was in the club and once in, members are never thrown out, no matter how egregiously they behave. Andreas's campaign slogan, incidentally, was a one-word exhortation: 'Change'. British citizens must pray that Sir Keir Starmer does not follow in his footsteps.

In the meantime, Turkey shot itself in the foot by having yet another coup, in September 1980. The military ruled for three years, with grievous brutality: 650,000 people were detained, 250,000 arrested and unknown thousands were tortured and killed as the soldiers cracked down on civil society.⁴³ Given the many other problems associated with Turkey's case (Cyprus, economic questions, the Kurds), one might have expected Turkish membership to be postponed until the *kalends*, but Thomas shows that once democracy returned to Turkey, so did pressure to permit Ankara's entry into the Community. By the early 2000s, Turkey met the 1993 Copenhagen criteria – ability to implement the *acquis*, a market economy, democratic institutions, and respect for human rights – in the main. Yet there remained subdued opposition. EU Commissioner Frits Bolkestein published a collection of interviews also entitled *The Limits of Europe*, which argued that Turkey should be a buffer zone between Europe and the Middle East, but no more.⁴⁴ Austria consistently opposed accession by Ankara and its government invented the notion that Turkey could have a 'privileged partnership' with the EU (an idea that should perhaps be resurrected as a way of strengthening ties between Britain and

³⁸*Ibid.*, 157.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 167.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 171.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 230.

⁴²K Gartzou-Katsouyanni, 'Backdoor Colonialism or Anchor of Modernity? A Short History of Ideas about Europe within the Greek Left' in M Gilbert and D Pasquonucci (eds), *Euroscepticisms: The Historical Roots of a Political Challenge* (Brill 2020) 164.

⁴³Thomas (n 26) 177.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 183.

the EU, now that a Euro-friendly British government has been elected). Electorates in France and Germany were almost equally hostile. Yet, at the decisive December 2004 European Council meeting, Bolkestein admitted that the EU felt trapped: ‘if a secret vote was held, in the Commission as well as government leaders, only a small minority would be in favour of Turkish accession. We are in a harness and don’t know how to get out of it’, Thomas reports him saying.⁴⁵ Turkey’s improved democratic and human rights record gave EU leaders no choice but to open accession negotiations. The European Council accordingly announced that membership talks would begin in October 2005, although they gave Turkey a less than ringing endorsement and warned that the process would be open-ended and might come with permanent safeguards attached.

Thomas does not discuss the 2004 and 2007 enlargements to Central Europe through the lens of his theoretical approach, saying that ‘this process has been so well documented and analysed’ elsewhere that there was no need.⁴⁶ I’m not sure. *Prima facie*, geopolitical and economic considerations played a major role in the EU’s relatively rapid expansion eastwards, and it would have been interesting to see whether Thomas’s thesis prevailed in this case, too. Instead, he concludes his book by charting how the ‘liberal democratic membership norm’ broke down in the case of Turkey. Thomas plainly considers that some EU governments moved the goalposts after accession negotiations began and that, although EU leaders played up Ankara’s technical failings over Cyprus, the Kurds and so on, at bottom the problem was that many of them, especially Christian Democrats, did not want a big, mostly Moslem state as a member. Cultural norms were inserting themselves into the equation and reconfiguring the universalist norms of the previous three decades. The EU, though admonished by the treaty to be ‘united in diversity’, was simply not united over a country that was so diverse.

Thomas does not directly address the question of whether Turkey’s subsequent lurch into authoritarianism under Erdogan could have been avoided had the EU been more open to Turkey’s diversity and more urgent about promoting its own values to the Turks. It is a huge, though obviously speculative question. The liberal universalism underpinning some constructivist theory regarding the EU is in conscious contrast with Samuel P. Huntington’s notion that the 21st century is likely to be marked by a ‘Clash of Civilizations’ between the ‘West’ and other civilizations that have contrasting value systems.⁴⁷ Many liberals suggest that the EU project can hurdle civilizational boundaries, witness the quotation from Kalypso Nicolaidis above. I think Thomas, by contrast, recognizes that some boundaries are in practice real and insurmountable, though he might wish that they weren’t.

Thomas also dedicates much space to Ukraine, which was another case where ‘normative dissensus’ in the first decade of the 21st century bogged down the accession process. Kiev found itself in the unfortunate position of ‘having to make costly reforms to demonstrate its *bona fides* to Brussels’ without knowing whether the reforms would eventually lead to membership.⁴⁸ As this review was being concluded, the EU announced that accession talks with Ukraine would begin. The upcoming negotiation will provide a good test of the robustness of Thomas’s theoretical approach – and of the EU’s claim to be a community of values. Will Ukraine’s status as an embattled democracy, albeit a flawed one, persuade the EU’s member states to show solidarity and let Kiev join the club? Or will they reason that Ukraine’s geographic collocation as a European state is open to dispute, that its membership will raise obvious security dangers, and that its reconstruction will mean notable (indeed, gigantic) costs for existing members? By their fruits, ye shall know them. Especially since there is no low-hanging fruit left to pick.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 184.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 159.

⁴⁷S Huntington, ‘The Clash of Civilizations’ 72 (Summer) (1993) *Foreign Affairs* 22.

⁴⁸Thomas (n 26) 215.

Thomas's *The Limits of Europe* is not a perfect book, but it is an important one. The failure to discuss the 2004 enlargement is a flaw. Historians will instinctively feel that it spends too much time hunting the snark of the independent variable instead of showing how different variables interacted in particular cases. But *The Limits of Europe* does put ideas and values at the core of the process of European integration, which is where they should be. It is suffused with a sense of the 'transitoriness of things in human history'. It depicts the EU as a space where political actors disagree, at times bitterly, over the right thing to do. It remembers the centrality of the member states and the men and women who lead them and portrays them as both the perpetrators and *prisoners* of concepts. When you finish it, you have looked at the mountain of EU history from an unusual angle.