

European Integration, 1950–2003: Superstate or New Market Economy? *By John Gillingham.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xx + 588 pp. Bibliography, notes, index. Cloth, \$70.00; paper, \$25.99. ISBN: cloth, 0-521-81317-4; paper, 0-521-01262-7.

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The formation of the European Union is a saga still in the making. To contemporary participants and onlookers, the sequence of events appears excruciatingly slow, marked by bold promises and visions promulgated against a Byzantine backdrop of bureaucratic, legal, and political intricacies. The strategies of the national leaders have the all-too-familiar look of balance-of-power considerations. Germany has provided the largesse to pay for its reintegration into Europe after ravaging the continent; France has exploited historical weaknesses, playing on both sides of the court while protecting its sacrosanct agricultural subsidies, no matter the harm they inflict on wider Europe; and the United Kingdom feigns a patient dedication to a Europe that it hopes will come to its senses some day.

Amid these strategies, negotiations, and betrayals, a Europe has nevertheless emerged. The European Union comprises just under half a billion people, who enjoy higher incomes, longer life expectancies, and lower natal mortalities than citizens of the United States. Its established institutions, which include courts, a commission, a council, and a parliament, have shaped a deeper awareness of a European presence among its national members. Still, the Union is not always a pretty sight, and its many peccadilloes are apparent to even the least critical eye. How tempting it is to resort to cynicism, if not satire.

John Gillingham's impressive and engaging history of the European Union gives full rein to both reactions. Yet Gillingham's obsessive attention to the organization's many intrigues, and his scathing (and at times shocking) wit reveals a passion for Europe that lends an extraordinary energy to five hundred pages of text filled with details, acronyms, statistics, and entertaining diversions. This is not an easy history, as it does not facilitate a linear understanding of the decision taken by democratic nations to accept a partial, yet radical, loss of sovereignty to a largely technocratic bureaucracy. Nor is this a book for the beginning student of Europe. Gillingham has no patience for defining critical terms. The reader will have to turn to another source, for example, to discover the meaning of "qualified majority voting."

Instead, Gillingham invites the reader to a *grande bouffe*, and he clearly has earned his place at the head of the table. In order to skip a description of what was, according to Gillingham, the European Union's misplaced attention to the threat of a far-right and racist

government in Austria, followed by a bilious rumination on Belgium, which he considers a “thoroughly corrupt” country (p. 325), and then a further digression into accounts of pedophiles and political scandals, the reader may want to exercise the thumb and advance a few pages. Politics offers many incidents of soap-operatic drama that, in Gillingham’s view, reflects the world. Thus he handily dispatches Jacques Chirac and the French to ridicule in the course of recounting the celebrated affair involving the oil company Elf and a minister of foreign policy, Roland Dumas, whom he describes as wearing a “s---faced grin” (p. 387). If Gillingham appears boorish and relentlessly Anglo-Saxon—the book relies heavily on articles drawn from the English-language press—his energetic writing no doubt is his proffered substitute for sensible reflections and simple manners.

The book could be categorized in part as a long essay, or *feuilleton*, of a type to be found in the pages of a highbrow newspaper or a literary magazine. One is reminded of Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s charming accounts of his visits to seven countries on the Continent (*Ach Europa! Wahrnehmungen aus sieben Ländern*, 1989), written in order to make sense of Europe. Gillingham prefers to render his own visits via readings of the popular press and of thoughtful books by protagonists in the European drama. Citing the peculiarity of contemporary history at the outset of the book, he requests the reader’s permission to be relieved of archival duty.

This tactic of dodging bibliographic responsibility comes at a certain cost, for the book is chock-full of the author’s personal views. Gillingham treats the continental European predilection for “civil society” and “solidarity” with as much fondness as Gibbons displayed for Christianity in his history of Rome. He deeply admires Margaret Thatcher and credits her policies of liberalizing markets and privatizing ownership for the revival of an English economy that, in his opinion, had been choked by labor unions and social-welfare programs. Ronald Reagan’s economic policies carried out on the other side of the ocean are praised for creating jobs, raising wages, and encouraging innovation, while acknowledging their lack of coherence. Gillingham associates the wave of liberalism that swept both sides of the Atlantic with Friederich Hayek, who emphasized the achievement of the “spontaneous order” through distributed competition.

Against this apostolic host, he respectfully opposes Jean Monnet, the French businessman-statesman who championed the cause of Europe. However, Monnet’s successors appear in a less favorable light in Gillingham’s tale. Jacques Delors, for one, is vilified by borrowing the comparison made in the popular press to the fraudulent car manufacturer John DeLorean. Romano Prodi, for another, is permitted to describe himself as “fat,” an adjective that

Gillingham is delighted to elaborate, calling him an “ol sausage face” and the “self-described happy fat man from Emilia-Romana” (pp. 329–34).

Such vivid words and phrases are bound to engage the reader, and they could be forgiven if they did not betray an intellectual arrogance, even a laziness. For Gillingham rarely attaches an analysis to his bolder statements. There are no charts, few if any references to the many statistical studies that have been done on the welfare state and growth (the correlation is surely a complex one), and little reflection on why growth may not be the only measure of national success. The conclusion that “the Swedish economic model . . . is not worth boasting about” (p. 191) is probably a fair one for the period from 1975 to 1995, but it fails to recognize either the exceptionally high quality of life enjoyed by the Swedes or the country’s per capita incomes. Its spectacular growth as a high-technology center could be attributed to liberal market policies, except that Sweden has retained an intensely state-heavy economy.

No European institution is spared Gillingham’s wrath, with the exception of the competition commission, whose wisdom is exaggerated—see his unqualified endorsement of its ruling to prevent the General Electric and Honeywell merger that survived American scrutiny (p. 474). Gillingham disparages the European Central Bank and the creation of the euro. These are easy targets, given the high European unemployment rates and the embarrassing violations of fiscal discipline by Germany and France. And yet what an achievement! A common currency now circulates in twelve of the fifteen EU countries. Leaving aside economic considerations, the psychological impact of the euro—and the disappearance of national currencies—surely deserves acknowledgement as a bold policy consistent with the long-term strategy of the EU to build Europe through a series of increasingly sweeping acts that gradually loosen national sovereignty.

Gillingham has equally scant praise for the EU’s “widening” expansion to include the new accession countries. Again, the economics of this decision appears to defy logic. Given the likelihood that the EU budget would not survive an extension of agricultural and structural subsidies to these new countries and the refusal of France, Spain, and Portugal to forgo current subsidies, it is reasonable to conclude that the EU’s policies toward the new members have been miserly. Politically, the decision to expand the EU boundaries is baffling to the average European citizen, who is not ready to support a parliament in which even a large nation has only a minority voice. The decision puzzles even the political elites, who suffer spasms of doubts about how the future Europe will be governed. Gillingham condemns the paucity of resources allocated to the new countries, particularly against the backdrop of declared bold visions of a larger Europe. The disconnect between promise and achievement explains the lack of enthusiasm displayed by the new members in recent European elections.

One strength of the book is its treatment of obscure, but critical, EU endeavors, such as the creation of the Framework Programmes that arose from Jacques Delors's transmuted Gaullist ambitions for a technologically advanced Europe. These programs have directed a growing portion of the EU budget to the support of specific areas of research that are then carried out by multinational consortia. A glaring weakness of such a structure is that scientific capability is not geographically egalitarian. Gillingham cites the complaints of eminent European scientists about the inefficiency of requiring collaboration among nations in different stages of scientific advancement. These criticisms are echoed clearly in recent EU-funded assessments of these programs, such as the Marimon report.

The unsatisfactory level of expenditures on science has a parallel in the applied-technology programs that subsidize private-sector efforts. Gillingham is perceptive in noting the paradox that Europe measures up well in scientific output but performs less impressively when it comes to innovation. The EU subsidies to the private sector have the appearance of industry capture of commissions; certainly the results in many instances have been disappointing. Still, the EU, and the European, public record reveals areas of success, notably in space and aeronautics and in transport. The overall assessment of European achievement is surely not black and white, but rather emerges in the aggregate as a dark gray. Gillingham sidesteps the task of performing a more refined analysis of such programs, content to observe that a lot of money has been spent on them.

The reader closes this book-length discourse brimming with Gillingham's opinions, on the one hand, with a sense of having been considerably amused (and possibly also somewhat irritated) and, on the other, with the certitude of having gained knowledge and insight into the workings and rocky foundations of the European experiment. Gillingham's acid satire reveals the instability of the EU institutions that have been wrested from parochial national interests. By this accomplishment—almost postmodern in its effects—Gillingham gives the reader a skeptic's perspective of the recent efforts to render from chaos a more defined body of institutions substantiated in a European constitution.

The book is far more of an insider story than the one offered by a popular competitor, *The European Dream*, written by Jeremy Rifkin in 2004. Rifkin understands that positive enthusiasm is an easier sell than intelligent, albeit long-winded, satire. But can one blame the reader for delighting in the simple boldness of concerted efforts to build from the sad ruins of postwar destruction a united Europe that offers a philosophically alternative vision of history and social evolution? One suspects that even Gillingham shares a feeling of awe in the face of this monumental work in progress.

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