

The Origins of European Integration: The Pre-History of Today's European Union, 1937-1951

Mathieu SEGERS

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Looking at the history of European integration, it is well known that the post-World War II period was crucial. Although the foundations of the idea of “unity” in Europe have a much longer history, this idea took on a more concrete form in the post-war period. In this sense, the Schuman Declaration of May 9, 1950, can be considered a turning point. Apart from this step, we should of course not ignore the contribution of David Mitrany and other theoretical studies, especially those focusing on functionalism. While there is dense and comprehensive literature on the history of European integration within this framework, Mathieu Segers’ 2024 work, entitled *The Origins of European Integration: The Pre-History of Today's European Union, 1937-1951*, analyzes the process from a different perspective. Focusing on the years 1937-1951, the book is almost like an archeological study. What makes it original in this sense is that it draws attention to the “American influence” in European integration, or “Americanisation” in his own words. Apart from the “Introduction” and “Conclusion”, Segers divides his work into two parts and six episodes.

The beginning of *The Origins of European Integration* paints a picture of European politics in the 1940s, underlining the main aim of the book. Accordingly, an attempt is made to re-discover the history of the origins and beginnings of European integration and the Europe of today. “The European Republic of Planning (ERP)” features prominently. The “Americanisation” of Western Europe in economic, political and cultural terms, one of the trends identified by Mitrany, is also relevant (p. 6). In the introduction, the following emphasis stands out: “In tracking the emergence of a European community within a wider transatlantic framework of Western partnership and kindship, the focus of this study is on the political choices and political processes that gave Western Europe its unique post-war shape and form” (p. 14). The transatlantic connection here is the link between European demand and American supply, arguably the most critical point of the study. In this context, the European demand was based on peace and stability, while the American supply points were the military and economic framework. Therefore, the Truman Doctrine must be considered in this context.

Part 1, entitled “Beyond Americanisation (1937-1947),” offers a comparison between the post-World War I period and the post-World War II period. According to this, the global leadership of the United States (US) strengthened in aftermath of the World War II. At the same time, in 1945, US President Truman stood at the head of the greatest military and economic power the world had ever seen, and a separate parenthesis is devoted to the New Deal. Indeed, Mitrany, who is considered a pioneer of functionalist theory, declared in 1943 that the institutions of the New Deal had “revolutionized the American political system.” Thus, the functionalist policy approach of the New Deal was seen as “the best, perhaps the only chance for the beginning of a new international life” (p. 50). Another US president mentioned alongside Truman was Franklin Roosevelt. The process of European integration and the establishment of a “social market economy” after the World War II is also given attention in this part, as is the process of “unification” towards an international legal order based on human rights, including social and economic rights. Bretton Woods also permitted American influence took center stage, and the role of the promotion of stable exchange rates is underlined by the author. In addition to the emphasis on Americanisation, this chapter also mentions the influences of Italian economist Luigi Einaudi, the construction of the European Christian Democrats and Alfred Müller-Armack, Joseph Shumpeter, Karl Polanyi and J. M. Keynes. But again, the Keynesians saw the only way to achieve reconstruction in Western Europe and to boost productivity and growth was the injection of money into Europe from the United States, hence the Marshall Plan.

The second part, “The Making of European Integration (1947-1951),” begins with various reflections on the process constructed in the first chapter. According to this, the Marshall Plan represented a radical revision of the mission of the World Bank, which was established at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 to provide financial support for the reconstruction of Europe. This chapter also includes discussions on religious perceptions of ‘unity’, revealing another dimension of the idea of unity. After the Catholic Church had distanced itself from its relations with nationalist movements, Pope Pius XII joined Truman in his ‘crusade’ against the Soviet Union in 1948. It is quite clear that here, the common enemy is at work. In the context of the common enemy and the “we”, one again comes across the American influence, and it can be seen that the gradual shift towards a revival of Western Europe could already be observed in and around Washington in 1946 and had far-reaching consequences for the way international politics was perceived in the Western world. The final stage was reached in 1950 with the Schuman Declaration. The following detail should be mentioned here: As early as the summer of 1945, Jean Monnet, who travelled to the United States on behalf of the provisional French government, presented the US Deputy Secretary of State Clayton with a plan to establish a European Coal Community to increase production in Germany.

The most important American link to the European integration movements was undoubtedly the support for the establishment of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC). Anecdotally, the institutional counterpart of the OEEC in Paris was the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) in Washington, established in 1948 to oversee the Marshall Plan, about which the author claims: “the US government may have embraced the ERP and the OEEC after their establishment and assessed them as adequate instruments with which to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in Europe, but that was about as far as clarity of thinking went in Washington” (p. 179).

In the conclusion, the following correlation was noted: “building Europe” has become more attractive to Americans than “building Atlantis.” Indeed, many of the contexts and reflections shared

in the work provide arguments that confirm this view, concluding with the following sentence: “The European Republic of Planning remains at the epicenter of the struggle for survival of the free world, as a powerhouse of peace in European history and a source of learning” (p. 209). In analyzing the history of European integration, the study looks at the Atlantic relations dimension of integration from different angles. This context puts it in a unique position with regard to the arguments put forward in this context. On the other hand, while the dimension of Americanisation cannot be ignored, the fact that Europe has laid the foundation for an integration movement based on its own values should not be denied. The American influence is not a secondary factor when it comes to identifying the elements that form the foundation of integration, but it would be wrong to consider it as the primary factor. Despite this handicap, it can be said that the book contains remarkable arguments for a reassessment of the foundations of European integration.