



REVIEW ARTICLE

# New Histories of and for Europe: Narrating the European Project

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Anthony Pagden, *The Pursuit of Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 423 pp. (hb), £20.00, ISBN 978-0198757665.

Stella Ghervas, *Conquering Peace: From the Enlightenment to the European Union* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021), 528 pp. (hb), £30.95, ISBN 978-0674975262.

Mark Gilbert, *European Integration: A Political History* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 358 pp. (hb), £68.00, ISBN 978-1538106808.

Luuk van Middelaar, *The Passage to Europe: How a Continent Became a Union* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 352 pp. (hb), £15.00, ISBN 978-0300181128.

Konrad H. Jarausch, *Embattled Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), 288pp. (hb), £23.00, ISBN 978-0691200415.

Approaching Europe's historical trajectories to explain its present condition is an ever-growing genre. More than 200 years after the Congress of Vienna, more than 100 years after the First World War, more than sixty years after the Treaty of Rome, more than half a decade after the Brexit referendum – and after more than a year of open warfare in Ukraine, the European project remains in constant flux. A seemingly endless sequence of junctures over the last two decades has raised the demand for historically grounded analyses of Europe. The desire for such publications, both academic and for a broader audience, is thus far from exhausted. Every turn in European politics gives rise to a new take on Europe's past by historians and scholars working in related disciplines.

Most recently, several publications have decisively contributed to scholarship as well as public debates on European integration.<sup>1</sup> This research is indicative of the attempts within the academy to reach beyond our immediate and highly specialised audience, often without shying away from making political interventions or judgements. This desire to speak to a larger readership also unites the publications assembled here. With a more systematic historical perspective and, in some cases, reaching back to the early modern period, their authors are, at first glance, less concerned with exploring or even intervening in current European crises. Yet all the titles discussed here present comprehensive

<sup>1</sup> See among others Ivan Krastev, *After Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); Aleida Assmann, *Der europäische Traum: Vier Lehren aus der Geschichte* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2018); Paul Betts, *Ruin and Renewal: Civilising Europe after World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2020); Kiran Klaus Patel, *Project Europe: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Shane Weller, *The Idea of Europe. A Critical History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Mats Andréén, *Thinking Europe. A History of the European Idea since 1800* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2023).

syntheses with an explanatory authority that inevitably impacts on debates about Europe's present condition as well. The fact that all the works under consideration here were written in or translated into English, and published in line with the conventions of Anglo-American publishers, is significant, and reflects the way in which Anglophone secondary literature can foster at times straightforward claims about the European project.

### A Long History of the European Project

A pioneer in long-term studies of political ideas of Europe, Anthony Pagden has now published his magnum opus on the intellectual history of the continent after editing *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* twenty years earlier.<sup>2</sup> A truly international scholar, he first studied in Barcelona during the late Francoist era and spent the initial part of his career in the United Kingdom and at the European University Institute in Florence before moving to the United States, where he currently teaches political science and history at UCLA. In his impassioned text, Pagden presents a large intellectual panorama of Europe beginning with Immanuel Kant and Napoleon's French vision and taking us all the way up to the present. He approaches Europe as a *project* in order to emphasise its numerous historical roots but also presupposes that a certain directionality is inherent in these manifold ideas of Europe, a directionality that gained momentum when European integration gained new impetus after 1945.

Pagden's long history, starting in the eighteenth century, however, is too refined to be simply a teleological account. Rather, he considers Europe through two lenses, which make for a highly persuasive book even if they are not new per se. On the one hand, the European project appears as the direct descendent of multiple founders including Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottfried Herder, Napoleon, Giuseppe Mazzini, Nikolaus von Coudenhove-Kalergi and those who carried the post-war integration period. On the other hand, Pagden deftly weaves this classical intellectual history into a history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century '-isms' related to Europe. Nationalism, patriotism, colonialism, racism and internationalism are all analysed here as constitutive elements of Europeanism, which itself emerged as an -ism or even an ideology in its own right.<sup>3</sup> Readers of *The Pursuit of Europe* come to realise the numerous undercurrents that account for the long making of the European 'project', its attractiveness as well as its contestations. The question remains as to what extent this panorama of -isms is applicable to different parts of Europe, and how central the concept of a unified Europe was to these movements. Or does the European horizon primarily emerge through our retrospective view?

Pagden's impressive scope and multi-rooted approach allow for manifold changes of perspective. These help to overcome a blind spot of some long-term studies on ideas of Europe, which tend to discard the point that the long nineteenth century was not only the 'age of nationalism' or 'imperialism' but also that of 'Europeanism'. Pagden's book further addresses the relative intellectual dearth of later twentieth- and early twenty-first-century European projects beyond the institutional processes of European integration. For the periods between the French Revolution and the First World War – between Kant and Coudenhove-Kalergi and between the Congress of Vienna and the League of Nations – he further substantiates an argument already made by Ute Frevert about how compatible ideas like the 'United States of Europe' were not only with liberalism, republicanism and liberatory nationalism, but also with colonialism and international law.<sup>4</sup> The chapter on 'The Scramble for the World' sheds light on important connections between colonial and expansionist, international, juridical and global thinking.<sup>5</sup> In the subsequent two chapters, devoted to the First World War and its aftermath, as well as to Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, he highlights how competing scenarios for

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Pagden, *The Pursuit of Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); Anthony Pagden, ed., *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Marius Ostrowski, 'Europeanism: A Historical View', *Contemporary European History*, 32, 2 (2023), 287–304.

<sup>4</sup> Ute Frevert, *Eurovisionen: Ansichten guter Europäer im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Pagden, *Pursuit of Europe*, 83–138.

Europe articulated by Oswald Spengler, Aristide Briand but also Carl Schmitt addressed very different challenges: the role of Europe in the world, questions of political order or defining who Europeans were, often in an essentialist manner. Pagden in particular points out the extent to which these conceptions were based on racial or spatial categories, such as the German *Groß- and Lebensraum* and the Italian *spazio vitale*. While the ‘pursuit of Europe’ might in part have been an instrument and a secondary goal here, such plans from the interwar period and the Second World War are the complement of the well-known *PanEuropa* discussions or European plans developed in resistance circles.<sup>6</sup> They also provide an essential background for understanding anti-communist continuities in European integration projects.

As for the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, Pagden distances himself from alternative visions of European belonging beyond the existing EU. Kalypso Nicolaidis’ concept of *demoicracy*, Richard Bellamy’s vision of ‘statist cosmopolitanism’ or the recent ‘gloom’ and ‘glory’ literature seem to refrain from measuring the EU against what it is for Pagden: ‘a new kind of post-sovereign international organization’.<sup>7</sup> In his final chapters, he carefully avoids reproducing the teleology, impatience or dissatisfaction triggered by the Treaty of Rome’s unfulfilled or threatening announcement of an ‘ever closer union’. What he highlights instead is how the deep intellectual roots of Europe not only underpin crises or contestations, but also provide spaces of possibility. Turning his attention to specific fields of integration such as the common currency, European citizenship or the Union’s constitution, he maintains his understanding of Europe as an ever developing project.

In this light, the institutional developments of European integration appear much less bureaucratic and functionalist than in short-term accounts. Pagden emphasises the achievements of European integration as European answers to European problems that the member states profit from: ‘For the most part, in most regions, the states of Europe are fairer, juster, healthier . . . more peaceful, more educated, more prosperous places than they were forty years ago’.<sup>8</sup> This serene and constructive rather than deconstructivist view prevents Pagden from overloading the ‘undeniable success’ of the European Union with expectations.<sup>9</sup>

One aporia, and maybe the most pressing one for twenty-first-century European integration, remains: if we acknowledge the apparent deficit of European identity within the existing EU to be a deficit of EU citizens identifying with Europe, then their voices and those of most of their ancestors both inside and outside Europe continue to go unheard in such an approach. Nevertheless, the pursuit of Europe, which Pagden’s intellectual gallery presents, was always a pursuit of the European people. Europeans reading Pagden’s story today will, beyond doubt, find it instructive and inspirational, but they have to look elsewhere for the unexpected and more vernacular historical voices that do not appear in this story.

### Another Long History of Europe’s Quest for Peace

The idea of Europe as a peace project has an undeniable force of attraction, confirmed by the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the European Union in 2012 and even more drastically at a time when war has – once more – returned to Europe in 2022, shortly after the publication of Stella Ghervas’s *Conquering Peace*.<sup>10</sup> Unlike Pagden’s intellectual history of the European project, Ghervas’s book

<sup>6</sup> See also the more extended discussions of the Nazi ‘New Europe’ during the Second World War; Johannes Dalfinger and Dieter Pohl, eds., *A New Nationalist Europe under Hitler: Concepts of Europe and Transnational Networks in the National Socialist Sphere of Influence, 1933–1945* (London: Routledge, 2019); Johannes Dalfinger, ‘Show Solidarity, Live Solitarily: The Nazi “New Europe” as a “Family of Peoples”’, *European Review of History*, 24, 6 (2017), 905–17.

<sup>7</sup> Pagden, *Pursuit of Europe*, 296; Kalypso Nicolaidis, ‘European Democracy and Its Crisis’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 51, 2 (2013), 351–69; Richard Bellamy, *A Republican Europe of States: Cosmopolitanism, Intergovernmentalism and Democracy in the EU* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Pagden, *Pursuit of Europe*, 299.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

<sup>10</sup> Stella Ghervas, *Conquering Peace: From the Enlightenment to the European Union* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021).

centres on the quest for peace as one integral element over time. Peace, so her central argument goes, has shaped what Europe has come to stand for. Originally from Moldova, then part of the Soviet Union, Ghervas has just moved to the Eugen Weber Chair in Modern European History at UCLA. She has spent much of her adult life in Switzerland and worked in several European countries as well as the United States. As a polyglot scholar, her research includes an impressively wide set of scholarship and primary sources.

*Conquering Peace* traces Europe's quest for peace over three centuries by working through five moments that had a lasting impact on the European political order following times of major geopolitical upheaval and war. Ghervas thus deviates from a strand of scholarship that has underlined the crucial role of destructive elements in forging what the European project has become historically.<sup>11</sup> Rather, her monumental writing foregrounds the European 'spirits' of peace since the Enlightenment, shifting historiographical emphasis away from periods of violence, their causes and logics, to the 'spirits' of peace that characterised post-conflict settings.<sup>12</sup> It is these post-war reconstructions that in her words are characterised by the peculiar diplomatic, intellectual and international dispositions she calls 'spirits', in reference to the French *esprit*, as for instance in *esprit du corps*.<sup>13</sup> The emphatic use of the 'spirit' metaphor does not always escape the pitfall of jargon, and the five key phases that readers encounter in the individual chapters follow well-established periodisations of European political history: the 1713 Peace of Utrecht; the 1815 Congress of Vienna; the 1919 Versailles Peace Settlement (though the 'spirit' is named after Geneva as home to the League of Nations); the European integration project after the Second World War; as well as the last decade of the Cold War and the EU's eastern enlargement. Peace, in this reading, was a direct result of political actors trying to contain the potential for military confrontation through an institutionalised and rules-based international order. Crucial to Ghervas's analysis are the various efforts by political leaders to implement peace and achieve forms of European stability.

The peace projects Ghervas describes differ in terms of their endurance. The concert of Europe in response to Napoleon's 'apocalyptic adventure' produced Europe's first modern integrated peace regime, which lasted until the Crimean War but already featured domestic repression by the 1820s.<sup>14</sup> The book therefore underlines that peace is not simply the total absence of conflict. The two chapters devoted to the European peace projects after 1945 are particularly refreshing, though Ghervas also speaks of the period from 1939 to 1989 as 'the Fifty Years' War'.<sup>15</sup> Unlike more conventional post-war histories of European integration, Ghervas brings to the fore the relations between European and international projects that impacted Europe, such as the creation of the United Nations or NATO, the Marshall Plan or the Council of Europe. However, peace was not unique to the Western camp's political agenda, even if the idea is often linked to integration projects within the West during the Cold War. For the 1980s and Mikhail Gorbachev, Ghervas accounts for developments in this regard in the Soviet Union and the countries of the Warsaw Pact. The question of whether this 'European Spirit' of the second half of the twentieth century truly was a 'Postwar European Spirit', however, requires further discussion. Here, Kiran Klaus Patel has provided a more nuanced analysis of European integration as a peace project. He argues that 'the EC had no need to create peace, nor would it have been able to' as the economic relations between the founding members 'reduced trade and other ties with neighbouring liberal democracies'.<sup>16</sup> For him, the pacifying

<sup>11</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin Books, 1998); Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Her choice of episodes is reminiscent of Bo Stråth, *Europe's Utopias of Peace: 1815, 1919, 1951* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Ghervas, *Conquering Peace*, 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 222; Patel, *Project Europe*, 56 (quote).

power of European integration rather revealed itself when it came to stabilise the young democracies in Greece, Portugal and Spain in the 1970s and 1980s.

When Ghervas associates a historical moment with a particular spirit, her narrative is nevertheless challenged by historical complexity and ambivalence. From a historiographical viewpoint, some of the parallels she draws between 1814 and 1919 or 1848, 1968 and 1989 suggest that history would repeat itself. Moreover, in contrast to the recent historiography on the end of the First World War, the chapter on the ‘Spirit of Geneva’ relegates the ongoing violence in Eastern and Southeastern Europe and Asia Minor to ‘complex and tragic’ appendices of the Versailles peace conference.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, her bold interpretation of the post-Cold War ‘Spirit of Enlarged Europe’ is debatable. After all, the ‘Fifty Years’ War’ – if we stick to her terminology – did not end in Europe in 1989/91 but rather changed forms and places. There is no mention of the wars in Chechnya, and those in the former Yugoslavia; the South Caucasus or Eastern Ukraine have also not made their way into the book. This oversight reduces the contradictions inherent in each historical episode, creating the impression of an even starker contrast between today’s Europe at war and its recent allegedly peaceful past.

Ghervas’s book is certainly no naïve call for pacifism under all circumstances. Rather, as the title itself suggests, peace must be conquered. In his *Henry IV*, William Shakespeare, who provided the inspiration for Ghervas’s formula, wrote: ‘A peace is of the nature of a conquest; for then both parties nobly are subdued, and neither party loser’. She is painfully aware that peace has never been the dominant character of Europe but always a fragile good, albeit one that has existed continuously since the Enlightenment. A clear difference between the conquest of peace in her understanding and a peace of the conquered or an imposed *Diktatfrieden* is that the former is the result of negotiations between all parties that were previously opposed on the battlefield. In this way, the book demonstrates the importance of carefully designing mechanisms that prevent the return to war. However, the set of moments studied in the book does not allow her – and maybe this is not her intention – to formulate an answer to the vexing question of what worked best to prevent future wars in the past. The prime example here is the process of European integration after 1945, which for a long time sustained the belief that war had become impossible in Europe – an ambition that has held true at least inside the European Union.

### A Short-Term History of European Integration as a History of Political Institutions

The challenges Europe faces in the twenty-first century are fundamental tests for the European integration project. As an alternative to long-term accounts, books that seek to understand the immediate historical roots of the current obstacles focus on the unfolding of post-war European history and the precursor institutions to the European Union. Mark Gilbert provides such a concise and accessible overview of institutional Europe’s political history. Gilbert specialises in post-war and Cold War politics. Originally from the United Kingdom and based since 2010 at Johns Hopkins’s School of Advanced International Studies in Bologna, he provided his first synthesis of political integration history back in 2003.<sup>18</sup>

In his updated account Gilbert consciously presents European integration history as an institutional history, not as a history of Europeans shaping and living through these processes. He thereby avoids expanding the history of European integration into a full-blown socio-political history and puts the emphasis on political leaders. His chronological account unfolds in ten chapters from the end of the Second World War to Brexit, periodised by the traditional political watersheds. He pays much attention to the economic agenda and presents balanced views on the principled vs. pragmatic or programmatic vs. functionalist development of the integration process. As a result, he leaves aside the

<sup>17</sup> Ghervas, *Conquering Peace*, 167; by contrast, see Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917–1923* (London: Penguin Books, 2017); Jörn Leonhard, *Der überforderte Frieden: Versailles und die Welt 1918–1923* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> Mark Gilbert, *Surpassing Realism: The Politics of European Integration since 1945* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Mark Gilbert, *European Integration: A Concise History* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

social and cultural integration politics that became more relevant from the 1980s, as well as the role that European people played on the streets, in revolutions and protests, but also their attitudes towards the European Community and the European Union. Gilbert rightly historicises what he calls the ‘EU’s soft power attributes’, without ceding to the demands for more normative accounts of European integration.<sup>19</sup> In parts, such stories about Europe being united through its common past, specific culture or distinctive values reiterate the EU’s own cultural and social integration projects such as heritage programmes, history museums or capitals of culture.<sup>20</sup>

Of all the works considered here, Gilbert’s account is certainly the most impartial and ‘un-whiggish’ in the sense that he refrains from presenting one single or several genuinely European ideas or a telos of European integration.<sup>21</sup> His book also comes in a much more conventional guise than, for instance, Patel’s *Project Europe* with its much more problem-focused approach to European integration history.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Gilbert’s assessments of the financial and migration crisis are not short on criticism – the question of which alternatives the EU might have had, however, remains firmly in the political realm.

Gilbert resists the temptation to present a teleological vision of European integration, but nor does he respond to these debates. Given his sole focus on institutions and their actors, he neglects concerns about the European project from outside the close circles, even though they are integral to European (integration) history. Limiting himself to a political history of the executive branch alone, Gilbert does so despite the ongoing debate about the EU’s democratic legitimacy or the legislative rights of the European Parliament in more federal scenarios for the EU’s future. The book’s cover, depicting a scene from Greek street protests against EU austerity politics in 2015, is thus a performative contradiction. It is striking that neither the European Parliament nor the European elections, nor the institutions of the European judiciary, receive much attention compared to ‘The Six’ or ‘The Nine’.<sup>23</sup> While not dismissing the importance of the executive branch, this shows how little resonance the otherwise flourishing field of the history of democracy has so far had in European integration history.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the pursuit of Europe has been a legislative, judicial and electoral project, a project of parties, representatives, electoral campaigns and voters.<sup>25</sup> In light of current political, social but also

<sup>19</sup> Mark Gilbert, *European Integration: A Political History* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 7.

<sup>20</sup> On these initiatives, Thomas C. Hoerber, Gabriel Weber and Ignazio Cabras, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of European Integrations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021); Wolfram Kaiser, Stefan Krankenhagen and Kerstin Poehls, *Exhibiting Europe in Museums: Transnational Networks, Collections Narratives and Representations* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014); Stefan Berger and Caner Tekin, eds., *History and Belonging: Representations of the Past in Contemporary European Politics* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2018); Kiran Klaus Patel, ed., *The Cultural Politics of Europe: European Capitals of Culture and the European Union since the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2014); Kiran Klaus Patel, ‘Kooperation und Konkurrenz: Die Entstehung der europäischen Wissenschafts- und Forschungspolitik seit 1945’, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 69, 2 (2021), 183–209.

<sup>21</sup> On Whig history, Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: Bell, 1931); Gilbert, *European Integration*, 8–9. See also his ‘Narrating the Process: Questioning the Progressive Story of European Integration’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 46, 3 (2008), 641–62.

<sup>22</sup> Patel, *Project Europe*; also Philipp Nielsen, ‘Writing the History of Postwar European Democracy’, *Contemporary European History*, 32, 1 (2023), 157–67.

<sup>23</sup> Kiran Klaus Patel and Christian Salm, eds., ‘The European Parliament During the 1970s and 1980s: An Institution on the Rise?’, special issue, *Journal of European Integration History*, 27, 5 (2021).

<sup>24</sup> On recent approaches to the history of democracy, Tim B. Müller and Jeppe Nevers, ‘Narratives of Democracy: A Call for Historical Studies’, *Journal of Modern European History*, 17, 2 (2019), 123–34; Nielsen, ‘Writing the History’; Anja Kruke and Philipp Kufferath, ‘Einleitung: Krisendiagnosen, Meistererzählungen und Alltagspraktiken: Aktuelle Forschungen und Narrationen zur Demokratiegeschichte in Westeuropa’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 58 (2018), 3–20; Silke Mende, ‘Das “demokratische Europa” seit 1970: Zeithistorische Perspektiven auf den Zusammenhang von Demokratisierung, Parlamentarisierung und Europäisierung als Forschungsfeld’, *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 71, 5/6 (2020), 315–29; Claudia C. Gatzka, ‘Die deutsche Demokratiegeschichte und der Blick ins Ausland’, in Lars Lüdicke, ed., *Deutsche Demokratiegeschichte: Eine Aufgabe der Vermittlungsarbeit* (Berlin: be.bra wissenschaft, 2021), 31–44. For Western European states, see Martin Conway, *Western Europe’s Democratic Age, 1945–1968* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Antonio Varsori, Giovanni Orsina and Lucia Bonfreschi, eds., *European Parties and the European Integration Process, 1945–1992* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2015); Daniele Pasquinucci and Luca Verzichelli, *Elezioni europee e classe politica*

historiographical developments, a top-down approach like this requires a stronger justification to fulfil the promise of providing a ‘political history’. Otherwise, the obvious blind spots of such a ‘general history’, with its portrayal of European citizens as passive witnesses to European integration, might be more of a provocation to many of them than this history intended.<sup>26</sup>

### European Integration Narrated from Close Distance

Not many Europeanists have successfully travelled between the academy and politics. Luuk van Middelaar is one of the few. He was speechwriter for the president of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, and is now Professor of ‘Foundations and Practice of the European Union and its Institutions’ at Leiden University. *The Passage to Europe* – based on his 2009 doctoral dissertation and translated into more than ten languages – turned him, a trained historian and political philosopher, into an internationally renowned expert who frequently comments on European affairs. He is well connected within the European institutions and uniquely placed to provide a history of European integration from within.<sup>27</sup>

The book unfolds over three large sections, each containing three chapters. Unlike his fellow Europeanists, van Middelaar does not present a chronological but a thematic and problem-based account, which avoids much repetition for those readers familiar with the basic developments but, given van Middelaar’s penchant for details, presents some challenges to those looking for an introduction. The first section highlights the difficulties associated with majority decisions in European institutions; the second section describes the post-war European institutional integration; and the third section examines the EU’s quest for legitimacy with a focus on European peoples and their relationship to European institutions. In each section, three European spheres lend a crosscutting coherence to the analysis: an outmost sphere of sovereign nation-states, nationally-minded political actors and geopolitics; an intermediate sphere of the member states and their deliberations; and the inner sphere revolving around European treaties.

The three spheres intersect and stand in a dynamic relationship with one another, allowing van Middelaar to convey a history of European integration that is most revealing when it comes to the dynamics within the European institutions, but can also neatly integrate developments in the respective member states and their political traditions. In his discussion, however, European history becomes primarily a history of the inner dynamics of the European institutions and their impact on society. It is these institutions that he is most familiar with, and he shows how they have functioned. Political actors from outside find themselves in peripheral roles here, especially those who do not belong to the original six that initiated the European integration process. In that respect, *The Passage to Europe* centres on a clear institutional European core, rather than how European citizens understand – and in many cases, reject or critique – the concept of ‘Europe’.

What sets the book apart is the third section where van Middelaar goes beyond the political science debates of input and output legitimacy. In this field, the focus has traditionally been on the participative process and the ways in which institutions and the individuals within them make decisions, as well as on the effectiveness and public assessments of government policy.<sup>28</sup> Van Middelaar thinks about

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*sovranaazionale: 1979–2004* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004); Jochen Blind, *Das Heimspiel der ‘Europa-Parteien’?: Die Europawahlkämpfe der Union von 1979 bis 2009* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2012); Ines Soldwisch, *Das Europäische Parlament 1979–2004: Inszenierung, Selbst(er)findung und politisches Handeln der Abgeordneten* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2021).

<sup>26</sup> Gilbert, *European Integration*, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Luuk van Middelaar, *The Passage to Europe: How a Continent Became a Union* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020); on the earlier editions of Middelaar’s book, Nielsen, ‘Writing the History’, 158.

<sup>28</sup> Fritz W. Scharpf, ‘Legitimacy in the Multilevel European Polity’, *European Political Science Review*, 1, 2 (2009), 173–204; J.H.H. Weiler, ‘In the Face of Crisis: Input Legitimacy, Output Legitimacy and the Political Messianism of European Integration’, *Journal of European Integration*, 34, 7 (2012), 825–41; Vivien A. Schmidt, ‘Democracy and Legitimacy in the European Union Revisited: Input, Output and “Throughput”’, *Political Studies*, 61, 1 (2013), 2–22; Michael Andrea

three distinct forms of legitimacy, namely what he calls a ‘German’, a ‘Roman’ and a ‘Greek’ strategy.<sup>29</sup> Referring to ideas of community-building in ancient as well as modern history, he introduces these strategies to explain how they contribute to respectively building a shared identity, providing benefits in the form of rights or economic progress, and involving citizens in decision making.

Van Middelaar is a committed EU-European and the question of telos emerges clearly in his text, inspiring us to think further about Europe’s future. And even if he claims that European integration in its current form is not strictly necessary, the language of the book is imbued with a notion of progress and teleological development, which underlines the gravitational pull of the intermediate sphere, despite all the challenges to Europe. The book is indeed a paean to the European Council as the ultimate locus of legitimate power in Europe. In that respect, van Middelaar presents a similar ‘executive’ vision of Europe to that which we find in Gilbert’s account. What is absent from *The Passage to Europe* is a history of the competing projects that have led to the present-day design of Europe, which we encounter in Pagden’s work. One might wonder to what extent this analysis of the status quo can really respond to the persistent shortcomings of present-day Europe as van Middelaar is less interested in the ‘past future’, that is the counterfactual histories of visions of Europe beyond the European integration that has developed.

### Europe’s Recent History as a Lesson for the Present

Perhaps a more consequential choice for analysing Europe’s current challenges through the lens of history would be to intervene in the current debate about European integration and disintegration through a history of the present. Konrad Jarausch’s *Embattled Europe* is a history of twenty-first-century Europe written as a call for twenty-first-century Europeans to realise what Europe has achieved and acknowledge that there is no alternative to it.<sup>30</sup> Reminiscent of Alexis de Tocqueville’s *De la démocratie en Amérique* (1835/40) in reverse, Jarausch holds up the history of European accomplishments as a mirror image of the polarised post-Trump United States – just like Tocqueville’s writing on American representative government, prisons or education held a mirror to post-revolutionary French society. This peculiar perspective makes Jarausch’s book stand out as one of a kind.

Transatlantic mediation is what Jarausch has dedicated large parts of his professional life to. Born in wartime Germany, he moved to the United States in 1960, where he has been teaching contemporary history at the universities of Missouri and North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A specialist in twentieth-century Germany steeped in transatlantic perspectives, Jarausch became an accoucheur of historical research in a reunited Germany, in particular as co-director of the newly founded Centre for Contemporary History in Potsdam, and a pivotal facilitator of transatlantic scholarly communication.<sup>31</sup> In the United States, he strongly promoted European studies and, in 2015, he published his comprehensive *Out of Ashes: A New History of Europe in the Twentieth Century*.<sup>32</sup> *Embattled Europe* continues this earlier account, yet in a much more engaged and openly partisan tone. While Jarausch, more than a decade ago, posited that ‘the Europeans have become a credible alternative to America in terms of peace, prosperity and equality’, after the experience of Donald Trump’s presidency he considers Europe to be ‘the only serious alternative to the Anglo-American way of life’.<sup>33</sup> As a ‘rousing yet realistic defense of the continent’, *Embattled Europe* contrasts the social,

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Strebel, Daniel Kübler and Frank Marcinkowski, ‘The Importance of Input and Output Legitimacy in Democratic Governance: Evidence from a Population-Based Survey Experiment in Four West European Countries’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 58, 2 (2018), 488–513.

<sup>29</sup> Van Middelaar, *The Passage to Europe*, 226–309.

<sup>30</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, *Embattled Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

<sup>31</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, ‘Contemporary History as Transatlantic Project: Autobiographical Reflections on the German Problem 1960–2010’, *Historical Social Research*, Supplement, 24 (2012), 7–49.

<sup>32</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, *Out of Ashes: A New History of Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

<sup>33</sup> Jarausch, ‘Contemporary History’, 46; Jarausch, *Embattled Europe*, 281.



political and cultural achievements of European integration with a much grimmer picture of radicalisation, inequality, decline and violence in the United States.<sup>34</sup>

Jarausch eschews spotlights on single EU members or events in favour of comparative enquiries into fiscal politics, environmental protection or the rise of populists across all of Europe. In this volume, he relies on his biographical authority and selected bits of journalistic and scholarly debate from the twenty-first century, out of which he extracts stories reaching from the post-communist transformations to the Russian annexation of Crimea, with the aim of emphasising the enduring positive implications of the European project on all of these conflicts. With a broad thematic and geographic scope, *Embattled Europe* expresses a left-liberal or social-democratic credo: reform-oriented, socially inclusive and compromise-minded, with a strong emphasis on welfare and sustainability, and a fervent plea for transatlantic cooperation.

Some chapters, for instance on the refugee crisis or Brexit, remain more descriptive than explanatory and are at times reductionist: in the 2015 migration crisis, it was probably not the ‘proclamation’ of a ‘welcome culture’ (if indeed such a proclamation ever existed) alone that made Germany a major destination for refugees, but rather, as Jarausch later recognises, the country’s economic strength.<sup>35</sup> The book covers three decades, but emphasises the post-1989 transformations and the dealings with the post-2008 crises, while largely discarding the dynamics of the 2000s, that is the years between the EU constitution project and the Treaty of Lisbon, which were far from a period ‘when everything seemed to be going well’.<sup>36</sup> Here, van Middelaar and Gilbert tell different stories of thorny reforms, the need for and limitations of compromise, and missed opportunities. Though somewhat disillusioned by the downsides of the ‘American dream’, Jarausch is not a nostalgic but an engaged optimist, who illuminates the resilience of European integration all too often veiled by the expectations implicit in gloom or glory narratives. Evaluating the progress of current events, however, proves difficult even for the most contemporary historian. Seven years after the Brexit vote, British ‘self-destruction’, at least, is not a *fait accompli* even if the latest upheavals in the UK may add to such an impression.<sup>37</sup>

*Embattled Europe* should stimulate further research engaging with its sources and arguments, in particular since Jarausch’s perspective on political balance and social welfare relies more on Germany or Scandinavia than on Southern or Eastern Europe or even France. Sometimes it seems as if he treats the latter regions with benevolent condescension. Indeed, the media coverage of European reforms and crises provides rich material not only for illustrating the European Union’s political, social and cultural variety, but also the underlying variety of ideas of Europe. In that sense, it is not only populists, Eurosceptics, anti-liberals and right-wingers who engage in the discursive ‘battle over Europe’. Rather, pro-Europeans are fighting their own battle, but with a much broader set of meanings than what Jarausch promotes as a ‘progressive alternative’ through a particular German-American lens. Such political diversity, however, is not the main emphasis here as Jarausch seeks to offer resources for the battle to be won. The question remains as to how it might be won and, we could further ask, what might come after such a European victory if not a new ‘end of history’? Here, Manichean visions clearly have a blind spot.

If European readers are looking for answers in this book, they need to remind themselves that the lessons of *Embattled Europe* are also intended for an American audience as a warning not to leave behind the liberal and social values that Jarausch’s European mirror reflects back across the Atlantic. The new juncture of transatlantic cooperation in times of war in Ukraine underpins Jarausch’s core concern yet in radically different ways. While Jarausch justifies his strong case for Europe in the transatlantic constellation on the basis of a European belief in ‘peaceful diplomacy and multilateralism’ contrasted with American uses of ‘military force’,<sup>38</sup> the EU, from 2022 on, has become a military player more than ever before, and multilateralism revolves to a considerable degree

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., cover text.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 122–42.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 9.

around a concerted supply of arms for Ukraine. One of the contingencies of writing histories of the present or well into the present remains the possibility that a new ‘spirit’, to return to Ghervas’s vocabulary, emerges and requires us to fundamentally historicise any preceding spirits, such as that described by Jarusch.

### Narrating the European Project for Twenty-First-Century Europeans

The synthesis that these books achieve raises the state of available historical accounts on ideas of Europe and European integration to a new level. While their methodological choices and narrative approaches differ, all of these studies emphasise the need for historically grounded debates about how the European project came about, evolved and might further develop. By eschewing more theory-based explanations (with the partial exception of van Middelaar), these comprehensive accounts do not necessarily provide provocative interpretations of the European project. Highlighting the importance of political institutions in the European integration process is probably as uncontroversial as highlighting the importance of warfare and peacemaking in European history.

The strong emphasis placed on single historical actors, thinkers and institutions might even seem irritating at times. Given the overall engaging and optimistic take on Europe in this recent collection, the extent to which these accounts privilege top-down views or intellectual *Gipfelwanderungen* (wandering from one intellectual summit to another) is striking. Using the most ‘vernacular’ base of sources, Jarusch’s turn to selected media coverage points to resources for more varied perspectives here. The persistence of intellectual or institutional approaches linked to a re-reading of largely classical authors, texts and institutions certainly remains legitimate, but implicitly also addresses a readership that shares significant characteristics with the authors, above all a strongly pro-European attitude. In many respects, these studies seek to affirm the European project, the integration process and EU institutions more than they deconstruct, debate or embed them. Their positive reception and commercial success, as reflected in translations, re-editions or awards, might therefore be a symptom of optimism. The ongoing demand for pro-European narratives certainly confirms their continuing attractiveness.

However, the absence of less elitist historical conceptions of Europe, or of alter-European and anti-European voices, narrows both the scope and the public resonance of these studies. While they are all acutely aware of the challenges the EU is facing in the twenty-first century – and the discourse about a 2022 *Zeitenwende* certainly adds further urgency to this perception – they also tend to repeat well-rehearsed topoi of what makes Europe European.

As a consequence, from reading this collection we might also look for new contours for analysing and narrating ideas of Europe. On the one hand, it is worth enquiring more deeply into ‘Europe’s Europes’, i.e. what Europeans meant and mean when they mobilise the category of Europe in political, social, cultural – and bellicose – discourse. This perspective links in with van Middelaar’s brief chapter ‘Winning Applause’ on bringing the notion of ‘European’ to the public.<sup>39</sup> As this public in the EU-27 relates to Europe in ways more diverse than the limited selection of languages, methods and academic styles in which most individual scholars operate, undertake their empirical research and write about Europe, such a broader perspective seems urgent for future scholarship. On the other hand, there are many historical and contemporary European voices who have not yet made it into European history books. It is worth reflecting on the extent to which anti-European, Eurosceptic or alter-European actors should also become an integral part of these accounts of the European project, rather than confining them to studies on populism, extremism, protest or disintegration. Together with the experience of *Zeitenwende*, this imbalance might be a motivation to grant more space to ambivalences and tensions, and thus to more diverse perspectives.

<sup>39</sup> Rieke Trimçev, Gregor Feindt, Félix Krawatzek and Friedemann Pestel, ‘Europe’s Europes: Mapping the Conflicts of European Memory’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 25, 1 (2020), 51–77; van Middelaar, *Passage to Europe*, 212–25.