

Afterword

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In the time since our 2010 workshop, the European Union has generated a good deal of drama. A serious debt crisis in Greece was repeated in Ireland, Spain, Italy, and Portugal. It threatened to undermine the basic fabric of not only the Eurozone but also of the entire European project, according to some pessimists. Commitment to the implementation of drastic, but much-needed fiscal reforms stood against the idea of European solidarity and a radical, Europe-wide growth plan. The many reform steps that the member states agreed on brought partial remedy but most were concluded under considerable time pressure, in which global markets instead of parliamentary procedures dictated the speed and direction. What they did bring was greater power of oversight for Brussels, yet at the time of this writing, it is still unclear how and if the sovereign debt crisis will be resolved on a more permanent basis.

Much of the commentary about the crisis, which in fact came to seem less like a crisis than a saga over the course of 2011 and 2012, placed the blame for it on two sources, primarily: the after effect of the 2008 global financial collapse and the structural flaws of the Maastricht Treaty. The latter case relates directly to the various themes and problems raised in the preceding chapters. To recapitulate the standard, although oversimplified and perhaps overdrawn calculus of German reunification: it was meant to take place within a stronger European institutional structure, which the Treaty of Maastricht and the various NATO-related promises – described in detail in Frédéric Bozo’s chapter – were supposed to bring about. Specifically, it also meant the adoption of a new currency – the Euro – that, largely on French insistence, Germany had to support and, largely on Jacques Delors’s insistence, Europe had to embrace as the means

to counter Margaret Thatcher's push for a liberalized internal market. Both went against the instincts of many people, particularly in West Germany where a strong *Deutschmark* and various forms of protection were sacrosanct, but Helmut Kohl agreed to the compromise. Economic results remained mixed; although in its first years, the Euro and the European Central Bank's monetary policy had restrictive effects on the German economy, it benefited later on. However, as has been pointed out many times during the recent crisis, a monetary union without a fiscal union cannot survive for very long. When growth stops, its fabric tears apart. Thus, Germany and other richer beneficiaries of the Euro have found themselves in a vise: stick to the principles – namely fiscal discipline – that have worked so well for them and watch the Euro collapse because of the failures of other states to abide by them; or “abandon” the principles in order to save the Euro but to enter unknown territory with one's own economy. That such a dilemma was not only predictable but predicted at the time of Maastricht has perhaps made it even more troublesome because the members of the European Union were later forced to confront and question the basis of their mutual project well after the debates were thought to have been settled.

Some people have said that this reveals the cynicism of the pro-EU camp that knew the unbalanced and unsustainable nature of the Maastricht Treaty, and calculated that, in the medium-term, it would lead to ever more centralization in Brussels no matter what. Risking the Union thus appears as the strategy to achieve an ever-deeper Union. Others would stress, however, that the Treaty was the optimal outcome of a tough, inter-governmental bargaining process, or that it simply reflects the minimal compromise that the elected leaders of the member states could agree on.

The viability of the European project, going back to its earliest days, has always been debated, doubted, reaffirmed, and debated again, repeatedly. Since Maastricht there have been three more treaties, a constitution, a fiscal compact, and more than a dozen referendums, nearly half of which were lost by the pro-Union side. The two central “flaws” of the project – the imbalances among states and the “democratic deficit” – are the same ones that have plagued European integration from the start, so much so that its history could appear less cyclical than a single theme with variations. It will probably continue this way for some time to come, or at least as long as it survives, which it appears to be doing.

An important, related theme in all this is the role of the United States. Barack Obama's administration's position during the crisis in 2011 and 2012 has been consistent: this is a European problem and Europeans can

solve it. This did not mean that the United States stood aloof – Obama and several members of his administration appeared more worried as the crisis deepened, and hinted that a great deal of talking was being done in private – but the customary rhetoric of transatlantic solidarity and community was missing. The reason that was given was that European leaders neither needed nor wanted U.S. advice. The precedent that was often mentioned was the 1998 Asian financial crisis, the response to which U.S. officials and bankers more or less micromanaged. Such an approach was not possible a decade and a half later, least of all with Europe.

This change points to a larger conclusion about the period covered in this book. What if the “shift” described by Mark Gilbert had not occurred when it did? Or, what if the Berlin Wall had fallen after Maastricht – assuming for the moment that the relationship between the two was merely correlative rather than causal – instead of before? These counterfactuals restate the double-sided question with which we began this volume: How much did the relative neglect of intra-European affairs by the United States during the 1980s work in their favor? How much did the promoters of European integration derive strength from an official (and, to a lesser extent, unofficial) counter-emphasis in the United States or (among opponents) in Europe? More than two decades hence, is it possible to conclude, moreover, that one of the main effects of globalization has been the erosion of transatlantic relations and a strengthening of European unity when some structural and political logic suggests that the opposite should have occurred? Did it have to happen thus? Or is it still too early to tell?

Answering these questions reminds us that the periodization of contemporary history is always in flux. Several of the foregoing chapters demonstrate that the “1980s” really began in the late 1970s, most likely sometime around 1977–78. The Cold War, transatlantic and European narratives support that chronology. So, when did they end? That is to say, when did the current divergence really set in? We argue that it occurred precisely around the time of Maastricht, which was depicted on both sides of the Atlantic, as Mark Gilbert has shown, as a project of, by, and for Europeans. It had been the preference of some Americans, in fact, for this to continue, with the new EU taking the lead in enlargement to the East for the integration of the former Warsaw Pact nations into the new “Europe, whole and free.” For a variety of reasons this was not possible, at least not right away, and so the emphasis of the George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations shifted again back to NATO. Why NATO? The rationale of the former Warsaw Pact nations was obvious enough: they wanted a

post-Soviet insurance policy that had little or nothing to do with deeper integration with the EU per se. The rationale for NATO, and for the United States in particular, was less obvious. To many people at the time, it appeared to be a decision taken by default.

Integrationism prevailed nonetheless. It was said that NATO enlargement had to happen in order to reunite Europe on an institutional basis; that it preceded or outpaced EU enlargement did not mean it would supplant it, at least not in principle, and the United States was only too happy to oblige, having come to see NATO enlargement as a way – perhaps the only way – to keep the Alliance viable after the Cold War. It seemed odd to some people at the time, but in retrospect it makes sense that the 1990s saw another peak of Atlanticist sentiment in the United States (not to mention in East-Central Europe) and to a lesser extent in Western Europe. That this took place alongside the tragic wars of Yugoslav succession in which NATO intervened after the diplomatic failure of both European and UN intermediaries was taken as further evidence that the transatlantic, security relationship still mattered. Yet, how much it was connected, or disconnected, to other relationships, both across the Atlantic and within Europe, remains imprecise.

During the following decade, relations between Europe and the United States reached a new low as a result of the Iraq war. If the apogee of the 1980s was not over by the mid-1990s, it surely was by the following decade. Transatlantic relations had gone from apogee to nadir. Still, it is unclear if the George W. Bush years were just another crisis in the long sequence of transatlantic relations since the early Cold War or a more fundamental turning point. Political conflict by itself does not say much about the viability of a political order. Bush's second term brought the two sides closer together again. And despite these conflicts, NATO and then EU enlargement proceeded apace, and some measure of transatlantic cooperation was restored. We are right to ask how much of that was anticipated and set into motion during the 1980s as a post-Cold War project, and whether, in retrospect, that decade, or parts of the decade as several of the previous chapters have suggested, do not represent so much an apogee as a culmination or, alternatively, a catharsis and the beginning of a new departure for the two parallel, late twentieth-century narratives. As Frédéric Bozo's chapter has illustrated, the counterpoint of rushing to a policy failure is a pre-emptive concession that ultimately leads to success when the timing and other factors become more favorable.

We began this volume with a discussion of periodization, which also raises questions of causation. Now, on reflection, we can say that the 1980s both comprise and represent several, not necessarily mutually exclusive, chronologies of the end of the Cold War and the integration of Europe. We cannot conclude with certainty that one set of actions definitely caused the other, or that the two were so interrelated as to be fully interdependent. Nevertheless, they are difficult, probably impossible, to disentangle. And here we speak mainly of politics and economics. Space did not permit us to include potentially valuable subjects – the ebb and flow of transatlantic tourism, or the Erasmus and similar exchange programs within Europe, for example, or the trends in fashion, art, popular music, and film. It would also be useful to examine the full set of questions from an outsider's perspective. The chapters by Ksenia Demidova, Arthe Van Laer, Holger Nehring, and Giles Scott-Smith do this to an extent in their respective areas, but it would also be important to know what others from parts of the world undergoing transformation in the late twentieth century – Asians or Africans, for example, or a wider range of actors from East-Central Europe – perceived the intersection of transatlantic and European relations during this period. To a large extent, then, our story has been an inwardly focused one. This is not meant to signify that Europeans and Americans were the only actors who mattered in it, or that politicians and other officials, particularly those from multilateral institutions, were the exclusive arbiters of events.

This is another way of saying that the transatlantic history of the 1980s has only just begun to receive serious treatment. May others continue what we have started.

