



John Gillingham. *Design for a New Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 287 pp. \$19.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-68664-8.

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The European Union—Any Chance for a Revival after Death?

John Gillingham is a proficient, provocative and innovative scholar, a historian of remarkable erudition. This book, though, deals more with the present and the future than with the past. Gillingham started his career with books on Belgium in the National Socialist economy and the relative continuities between plans for Nazi-dominated Europe and the initiation of the European Community for Steel and Coal. His last major work was a comprehensive history of European integration over more than half a century in 2003.[1] In many respects, this volume is a follow-up to his previous work, in which he draws conclusions and gives some recipes for today's European integration. He writes, "Many scholars have been infected with the EU virus. The time has come to talk turkey" (p. 6). The approach is radical and can be regarded as a typically British position: integration made sense in the 1950s when coal, steel and a common market were debated. But since that time some politicians (like Walther Hallstein) and especially institutions (such as the European commission in Brussels) have developed a tendency to exaggerate their importance, as they have spoken not only of the integration of different sectors and the creation of a free-trade zone, but also have envisioned creating a European super-state. Hallstein was fortunately checked by people like Charles De Gaulle, but positive European rhetoric since then has prevailed. Brussels and Strasbourg have developed thousands of pages of guidelines full of artificial language without any relation to reality, a "Volapük" no one really understands. In response to such developments, other politicians pointed in the right direction in the 1980s, like Margaret Thatcher,

who suggested limiting the goals of the European Community, later European Union, in order to concentrate on core issues such as the co-ordination of trade activities.

"Governance" is one of the catch-phrases Gillingham applies critically to the European Union in order to characterize a new kind of transnational interaction. The Union may have had some useful features in the past, Gillingham argues, but now it has degenerated into an instrument facilitating France's domination of Europe, especially through its close partnership with Germany, and thereby conserving France's status as a world power, independent of the United States: "Paris had managed, by projecting military power, to keep Germany in tow, Washington out of step, and Moscow, Tokyo, and even Beijing respectful of French status" (p. 26). For Gillingham, such control is the underlying, deeper sense of the E.U. machinery. Brussels and its political system are corrupt and superfluous. With sharp judgment, Gillingham presents ample evidence of this position. He shows how statistics have been forged, how control fails and how committees persist without a real task, or if they have one, produce nothing but hot air, or even worse, more paper. Sometimes there are brave newcomers, especially from the newly-accepted states with different approaches, but they quickly get lost in the usual bureaucratic jungles, are degraded—and fail. Brussels spends immense sums for virtually no result. Gillingham does not shy from quoting personal salaries and additional benefits as a sign for the dangerous character of the whole "empire by stealth" in a "dysfunctional family" (p. 39) that has experienced just one success story: the European

Court. Not surprisingly, Gillingham regards the failure of the proposed constitution as a good sign that the citizens of the European states understand that Brussels is out of touch with reality.

Gillingham pours special contempt on the European parliament, not only because of its expensive commuting between Strasbourg and Brussels, but also for reasons of principle. Without an autonomous right to budget, it will never become a real parliament; it is useless, costly and dangerous. Even today, the Common Agricultural Policy consumes some 50 percent of the budget; regional and R & D funds are other major assets that do no good. He concludes: "Finally, the EU has got to stop swamping national legislatures with an endless stream of often unnecessary and sometimes harmful regulations, directives, and decisions, lest it, along with the rest of Europe, strangle in red tape" (p. 57). An emerging new world order in which China, India, Brazil and many other countries are gaining more and more importance while Europe is falling behind, as declining economic growth rates prove, aggravates the European dilemma. Not only Brussels, but also the major European pacemakers of integration—Germany, France and Italy—pose grave threats to themselves. Gillingham considers the European Monetary Union nonsense, pointing out the difficulty of using one barometer for the economies of Norway and Sicily at the same time.

Despite the ubiquitously derisive tone of this otherwise brilliantly formulated study, Gillingham proposes alternatives to the current state of European Union policies, albeit unfortunately weak ones. He cannot provide us with real solutions. One example he presents in order to underline the backwardness of Europe during the present stage of globalization is biotechnological change, in which China has the lead! "Dr Frankenfood starts global!" (p. 138), he writes. In particular the last chapter, "Democracy," is quite disappointing. Although he diagnoses failures in this regard everywhere, he sees signs of new developments in Turkey and Ukraine. Despite his awareness of the structural weaknesses of democracy and the respective economies in these countries, he is somewhat enthusiastic, expecting that they can show Europe a new and better direction—of course as nation-states, not as the super-state the European Union pretends to be. This claim is strange indeed because the Maidan (the Ukrainian parliament in Kiev) is not yet the successful focus, and, as he acknowledges, "threading the needle" is still underway (p. 208). The book is very up-

to-date, with a conclusion that addresses events as late as April 2006, but Ukrainian developments in recent months seem to paint a different picture.

Thus, in Gillingham's opinion, Brussels and the European Union should be decommissioned. This costly task, Gillingham finds, is nonetheless a better alternative than the permanent haggling that makes Europe appear sick and sluggish in a globalizing world. The WTO's Doha round, which failed after the book was published, was a step in the right direction, but the fixing of the terms of the Common Agricultural Policy for years to come was a fatal mistake: "Such fecklessness calls into question the value of the EU. Is it signing its own death warrant?" (p. 180).

What should one make of Gillingham's fierce fight against most of what is going on in Europe? The book certainly can be seen as a wake-up call. The author has assembled an excellent array of facts and quotations of mismanagement. In general, his diagnosis is over the top: too strong, too pessimistic and too polemic. But it is a welcome counterweight to all the augurs who declare every new EU regulation a milestone in progress toward integration and the emergence of a super-national structure that will constitute a new actor in world politics. Rhetoric is not politics—economics is a better scale—but perhaps not in the sense Gillingham makes of it. The title cover shows a vessel with the inscription of the Euro symbol and a blue sail with the European gold stars on it. A lonely man with his telescope and a scarf flapping in the wind watches the horizon. The iconography, of course, is modeled on the famous Marshall Plan ship with full sails and the flags of the recipient states in the late 1940s. What was useful for the whole of western Europe at that time is now ceded to a lonely astronomer on board a sailing ship encountering choppy seas. Where is it sailing? Nowhere?—an answer to this important question, which John Gillingham provides with bitter and sweeping provocation.

Notes

[1]. John R. Gillingham, *Belgian Business and the Nazi New Order* (Ghent: Jan Dhondt Foundation, 1977); idem, *Coal, Steel and the Rebirth of Europe, 1945-1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); idem, *European Integration 1950-2003: Superstate or New Market Economy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

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