

# The European Union: A Critical Guide

Friday 26 October 2012, by [McGIFFEN Steve](#) (Date first published: 2001).

**An introduction to the book by its author, and Spectrezine editor, Steve McGiffen.**

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This book was written with two aims in mind: the first might be summed up as “know your enemy”. Quite simply, many people who rail against the EU don’t really know what they’re talking about. This doesn’t mean they’re not right. Most people who consider themselves “pro-Europe” are similarly ignorant. In fact, most people who consider themselves “pro-European” would cease to be if they knew the first thing about the EU. In order to argue effectively against anything, however, it’s best to know something about it. Worse, and this brings me to my second reason for writing this book, in order to find anything out about the EU, its institutions and decision-making procedures, you have in general to wade through sewers full of Europhile nonsense, expressed in the turgid prose at which, for some reason, such people excel.

So, what we set out to do was provide a usable textbook or introduction to the European Union for students of politics or international relations, or for the lay reader who simply wants to know what is going on. Those expecting a polemic against the EU will be disappointed. Plenty such diatribes already exist – indeed, I’ve written a few myself – but here our aim was quite different. The book is, as its title makes clear, a guide to the European Union, a critical guide.

Between its covers you will certainly find plenty of criticism of the European Union and its policies, as well as attempts to answer the Europhile case, such as it is. You will also find clear explanations of each of the major treaties, the institutions, and legislative procedures. If you don’t know your Council of Europe from your European Council, why the word “conciliation” sends shivers down the spine of European parliament officials, or how many votes Luxembourg has under QMV, this is the book for you. That is, if, of course, for some reason, you want to know these things....

Having dealt with the sometimes labyrinthine structures and Byzantine goings on which accompany them, The European Union: A Critical Guide goes on to look at the major policy areas currently occupying the time of Eurocrats in Brussels and beyond. In separate chapters, the book explains and analyses EU enlargement, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), ‘Citizenship, Justice and Home Affairs’, the euro, the internal market, economic relations with non-members, employment and social policy, the environment, public health and consumer protection, the Common Agricultural and Common Fisheries Policies (CAP and CFP), transport, regional policy, and finally industrial policy and energy.

If you want to buy the book, you can order it from your local bookshop or go to the publisher’s

website . If you're too poor to do that, order it from your public library.

Below, to give you a flavour of what you'll be missing if you don't buy, borrow or, well, in some other way acquire a copy of Steven P. McGiffen *The European Union: A Critical Guide* (Pluto Press, £11.99), we publish a couple of extracts.

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## **Chapter 6 - The Common Foreign and Security Policy**

Before Maastricht, the European Community had no real official foreign policy and though foreign ministers of the member states met regularly, they did not do so as the Council but under the aegis of the elaborately-titled Foreign Ministers Meeting in Political Cooperation, with no formal powers. With the end of the Cold War pressures had mounted to abandon the virtual taboo on moves towards a genuinely common foreign policy. Once again, the collapse of the Soviet Union changed everything. When foreign and defence policy were developed within the context of a bipolar world, attitudes to the two 'superpowers' were all-important - and amongst EC member states they differed considerably. Britain was loyally pro-American, France more even-handed, and West Germany had still, to some extent, to do as it was told. Then, in the nineties, there was suddenly only one superpower.

There were those who dreamed that a united Europe might make it two. Some of the political leaders who flaunt their newly-discovered 'European' credentials as if they were marks of a pacific and well-meaning internationalism are in fact what used to be called Great Power Chauvinists: in place of an all-conquering France, Germany or Britain they favour a strong multinational Greater Europe, with its own army and a relationship with the United States which would recreate the kind of wary respect with which the nineteenth century Powers eyed each other across the negotiating table. On the other hand, there are elements in the United States which have welcomed the possibility that 'Europe' might at last be able to pay its own defence bills. With the USSR out of the way, large sections of American opinion began to wonder why GIs had to be stationed in Europe at all.

### **From Yugoslavia to Amsterdam**

In the 1990s, as change in Central and Eastern Europe gave way to chaos and war, the argument was increasingly heard that if 'Europe' wanted to be taken seriously it must develop an independent capability to respond - politically, diplomatically and ultimately militarily - to crises on its own borders. The break up of Yugoslavia and the subsequent horrors in Croatia, Bosnia and most recently Kosovo amplified these calls.

The result was Maastricht's creation of the Second Pillar and the replacement of Political Cooperation by a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). In the urgent context created by the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia. Amsterdam attempted to go further than this, to bring the dream of a united and assertive 'Europe' closer, by extending majority voting in certain areas of foreign policy and, most strikingly perhaps, by providing for the appointment of a High Representative for the CFSP. In 1999, the first appointee to this post, former NATO general secretary Javier Solana Madariaga, the man who had presided over the bombing of Yugoslavia, took

office.

In addition, the Amsterdam Treaty provided for the formulation of a common defence force, though not immediately. The Treaty merely empowered the Council to set up such a force should it wish to do so, a decision which must, however, be ratified by every member state. A long-standing but largely moribund defence cooperation organisation, the Western European Union, became, in effect, the military wing of the EU, with responsibility to draw up and put into practice any decisions with defence implications. Official integration of the WEU into the Union could occur, but again only if ratified by all member states.

By deepening the foreign and defence policy role of the EU, Amsterdam sharpened the Union's military aspects. Its provisions represented a further erosion of the autonomy of the member states, including most disturbingly the four - Austria, Finland, Ireland and Sweden - which had long been neutral. The Treaty made such neutrality difficult if not untenable.

It has been argued that the position of neutral member states is protected by Article J7(1) which states that 'The policy of the Union in accordance with this Article shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and shall respect the obligations of certain Member States, which see their common defence realised in NATO, under the North Atlantic Treaty, and be compatible with the Common Security and Defence Policy established within that framework'. In fact, a careful reading of this Article in the context of the rest of the Treaty demonstrates that it is the latter part of this clause which carries the punch. J7(1) is there to reassure NATO that an emerging EU defence policy will complement, rather than undermine, its own - for which read the USA's - hegemonic role. This is of particular concern to the UK, the second biggest contributor to NATO and the United States' most reliable European ally, or, if you prefer, lapdog.

The fact that one of its open aims was to promote the co-ordination of armaments manufacture is a blatant demonstration that the EU's much-vaunted commitment to peace comes with strings, if not a burning fuse, attached. Recognition of the special, highly political and therefore partly extra-commercial nature of the weapons industry had been under pressure for some time before Amsterdam, both from outright militarists and from those who could not bear to see a sector worth £40 billion a year - fully 2% of EU industrial production, and a workforce of around a million - treated as anything other than just another industry whose competitiveness needed enhancing in the face of growing market pressure from the US and others. As former Industry Commissioner Martin Bangemann said shortly before the Amsterdam Summit, 'The fragmented nature of the European defence industry clearly gives it a competitive disadvantage.' Amsterdam changed the institutional balance of power, allowing 'the Union' and not the Maastricht formulation's 'Union and its Member States' to 'define and implement a common foreign and security policy'. In addition, the Treaty states that 'the European Council shall define the principles of and general guidelines for the CFSP, including for matters with defence implications' (author's italics). The post-Amsterdam CFSP includes the 'progressive' (instead of Maastricht's 'eventual') framing of a common defence policy, 'in accordance' with the WEU.

Moreover, Amsterdam integrates the WEU's responsibility for 'humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking' - known as the Petersberg tasks after the place where they were originally formulated - into the EU. Whilst the Petersberg tasks may well include worthy and genuinely humanitarian missions, their definition is so wide and vague as to allow almost anything. We live, after all, in the age of 'humanitarian bombing'. If NATO believes that ariel bombardment of civilian populations can be defined as one of the legitimate '(t)asks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking' then the EU and WEU are hardly likely to differ. Moreover, the Treaty's wording, that

the common defence policy 'shall include' the Petersberg tasks, implies that there is nothing to prevent the EU from doing whatever else it may choose. >

In case anyone was left in any doubt as to what was intended, the fifteen heads of state and government, together with the President of the European Commission, responded to the Kosovo crisis and subsequent NATO bombardment by declaring, at a European Council meeting held in June, 1999, that 'the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises without prejudice to action by NATO.' Such actions would include, but not be limited to humanitarian and rescue missions, crisis management, and 'peacemaking'.

### How the CFSP works

Common foreign and security policy (CFSP) is governed by the provisions of Title V of the Treaty on European Union. The Maastricht Treaty established a three pillar structure, and Title V constitutes one of the three 'pillars' of the European Union, the others being the European Community and Justice and Home Affairs. Decisions were initially by unanimity, and the Commission, Parliament and ECJ had no competence. Since Amsterdam, however, measures may be adopted by QMV. A state may, however, register a 'constructive abstention', which may include opting out of the action or policy decided upon; or it can use the power of veto, in which case the matter may be referred to the European Council if the member states decide by QMV that they wish to do so. The Commission now has a limited role, mainly in policy implementation.

The European Council is also empowered to define a 'Common Strategy' governing the CFSP approach of the Union in regard to a particular problem. Once a Common Strategy has been defined, it is implemented by the Council of Ministers which is able to take decisions under it using QMV.

The Council is assisted by a High Representative for the CFSP who may also speak for the EU if asked to do so by the Presidency country. The High Representative is in turn assisted by a Planning and Early Warning Unit. The Unit's tasks are to

- monitor developments in areas relevant to the CFSP;
- provide assessments of the Union's foreign and security policy interests and identify areas on which the CFSP should focus
- provide timely assessments and early warning of events, potential political crises and situations that might have significant repercussions on the CFSP;
- produce reasoned policy option papers for the Council

The CFSP opens the way for the EU to develop a common defence, including joint armed forces, should the European Council decide it; and it allows for the integration of the Western European Union (WEU) - the defence organisation which brings together European NATO members - into the European Union.

### Common (Market) values?

The arguments in favour of CFSP, and, by implication, of a European Union military capability, are straightforward. The EU is a strong economic presence in the world, which gives it political interests

which must be promoted. Together, the EU and its member states account for more than 50% of both international development aid and humanitarian aid, a third of aid to the middle east and almost 60% of that which goes to the former Soviet Union. In addition, as we saw in the last chapter, the member states are the major trading partners of their neighbours to the east.

As the CFSP's own website puts it, 'The Union must defend the values common to the Fifteen, its fundamental interests, its independence and its security. It must be capable of meeting multiple threats, such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, arms trafficking, contraband nuclear material, fundamentalism and extremism. The emergence of local conflicts, or wars, as in former Yugoslavia, can also destabilise neighbouring States.'

As with so many aspects of the European Union, what tends to irritate opponents of the CFSP, or, as they see it, 'militarisation' is the pretence that what is being defended is a common set of values and interests to which all Europeans, and indeed all civilised or decent people, automatically and unquestioningly subscribe. Whether such values can be said to exist at all is a matter of intense philosophical debate and speculation, though never amongst the EU's ruling elites. That they might include a particular version of the market economy is, to say the least, questionable.

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## **Chapter 17 - Conclusion**

My ambitions in writing this book were two-fold. Firstly, I wanted to provide students with a basic guide to how the European Union functions. There are plenty of these around already, of course, but they are invariably written by people with a vested interest in spreading the integrationist gospel. This can make them quite painful to read, but it also distorts what they have to say. Certain arguments - such as that Qualified Majority Voting is inherently undemocratic, or that all sorts of feasible alternatives to this European Union exist - are deemed unworthy of consideration and simply ignored. For this writer, they go to the heart of the matter and, whatever side of the fence you eventually land on, no meaningful analysis of the EU is possible until they have been dealt with.

My second aim was to present a critique of the EU and its integrationist project which attempts to get right away from the question of nationalism and internationalism. I have written this book as an Englishman who lives in Belgium and works for an international organisation, representing a Dutch political party on the secretariat of the United Left Group in the European Parliament. Like most left-minded people of my generation I associate the Union Jack and flag of St George with fascist demonstrators. I believe nationalism to be the religion of fools and a major weapon in the armoury of charlatans. Yet I have no more time for "European" nationalists than I do for any other kind. The sight of adults waving flags is generally an unedifying spectacle, whatever symbols appear on them. On the other hand, the fact that decisions should be taken as close to home as possible, that the further away in distance and culture decision-making bodies become, the greater advantage to the rich lobbyist, these are sound reasons for defending the rights of national parliaments to do what they are supposed to do: express the will of the people. The fact that they do this imperfectly is inarguable; but the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee - none of these expresses any will other than its own.

Culturally, nationalism is a dead end and the world deserves to be the oyster of all of us. "European" nationalism, as promoted by the self-styled "pro-Europeans", is no different to any other kind. Whether you prefer Goethe to Shakespeare or Chimay to Guinness does not have the slightest

bearing on the problems we have to tackle in an attempt to understand the EU and what it is up to.

Time and again we see reforms, carried out in the name of economic integrationism, which undermine political democracy; countries admitted to the Union following referenda in which the "Yes" campaign's propaganda consists of lies, half-truths and irrelevancies; the militarisation of a "Union" which is supposedly being constructed in the name of peace; the inflicting on people of an unwanted and bogus "citizenship" over which none of the "citizens" has been so much as consulted. Monetary union, which threatens chaos and disruption to the sole benefit of multi-national corporations, is sold to people in the most facile way, with no explanation as to what it really means and no admission of what it is really for. Successive summits attempt to convince us that a system which has kept unemployment high for decades can be transformed into a job creation machine, though of course we may have to give up a few social rights to achieve the promised land of full employment. A Community responsible for the Common Agricultural Policy, certainly the biggest single cause of environmental degradation in western Europe since the war, now presents itself as a champion of the environment. And so on. Try as I might, I have been unable to identify a single policy area in which the Treaty of Rome has had a beneficial effect. Everything the EU does is either undesirable or could have been better achieved by other means.

The European Union is a technocratic project. That is to say that it is based on the premise that politicians can no longer be trusted with macro-economic policy. Neither they nor we, the people who elect them, understand it well enough. It must be left to specialists, to bankers, whom we are expected to believe are above the sectional interests which motivate the rest of us. The fact that the European Central Bank is answerable to no-one, or that Qualified Majority Voting means that laws can be imposed on people against their express wishes and over the heads of their elected representatives are small prices to pay for greater "efficiency".

Technocracy has always done this, exploited the notorious "inefficiency" of democracy to undermine people's confidence in themselves and their ability to run their own societies. If you agree that all decisions should be taken by "experts" as far removed as possible from popular accountability then the European Union of the Maastricht Treaty is precisely what you want. But if you believe in free cooperation between democratic nations then that same Treaty removed whatever space the Treaty of Rome had allowed for such a system to develop.

Effective resistance is possible. In order to defend what is left of democracy, to make a genuine internationalism possible, and create real alternatives for tackling the urgent problems facing all of our nations, we must first leave all the flags at home, forget about whose picture is on our money, and make a bonfire of all those national myths we were force fed as children. Instead, look at the EU's policies and just how they are made. I have tried to make this book, with its bibliographies, a starting point for doing just that. Unless you happen to be the CEO of a multi-national corporation, I believe that you will find that only one conclusion is possible.

In each chapter of this book you will find reasons, I believe, to question whether the EU in its present form is really the best approach to governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Having spent the last fifteen years working within one of its institutions (the European Parliament), I have seen nothing to disabuse me of the view that the integrationist project serves only one agenda - that of the multi-national corporations (MNCs) whose growing hegemony of power at all levels threatens everything that has been gained by people in developed countries over the last two centuries: democratic rights and freedoms, economic security, the chance to live a dignified, productive, fulfilling life. These chances are now denied to a greater or lesser extent to growing numbers of people, whilst for most in the underdeveloped world they are further away than ever.

Numerous impulses fed into the original drive to establish the European Economic Community: the

desire for a sustainable peace and the fear that France-German rivalry would once again destabilise the continent was certainly one of them. In the main, however, the Treaty of Rome set out to make western Europe safe for capitalism, and in particular for the biggest corporations, which wanted a domestic market comparable to that available to their American rivals.

Since then, the power of corporations has grown, and that of other social forces diminished. This is reflected in the four major treaties - the Single European Act, and those of Maastricht, Amsterdam, and Nice - which have carried integration ever further since the mid-1980s. Of course, other influences can be detected: the hesitancy of some member state governments when it comes to handing over power to supra-national institutions; a cultural conservatism growing from the continuing power of Christianity (of various brands) in European social life; even, here and there, the aspirations of 'ordinary' men and women. The consistent theme, however, is that what's good for business is good for everyone, and what's good for business, of course, is to be able to make profit with as few restraints as possible - even where these restraints involve the wellbeing of the environment or the people and other beings which inhabit it.

The so-called Washington Consensus, which has dominated the theory and practice of big capital and its political servants for almost two decades, is that government expenditure as a proportion of GDP must be reduced, whilst the influence of the state gives way to the 'free play of market forces'. The corollaries of this idea, which lies at the heart of what is now known as 'neo-liberalism' are far-reaching. Firstly, it means that the state must withdraw from most spheres of economic activity. Nationalised industries must be sold off (in reality, most have been virtually given away). Where the market proves truly unable to provide a necessary service, you first question its necessity: thus, public transport no longer exists in huge stretches of rural and small-town America, because well, everyone has a car and if you do provide buses nobody uses them. Universal postal services are no longer needed because it makes more sense to ensure that everyone has email. And if people with more money can buy better food or a bigger car, why shouldn't they also spend their money on health care, or education, or even having themselves or their children genetically modified so that they are brighter, taller, more beautiful than the rest?

Even to pose such questions demonstrates a moral bankruptcy and egotism which was once confined, at least publicly, to the fringes of the right but which is now almost commonplace. The case for 'the market' is now rarely put - in, for example, the European Parliament,; it is simply assumed; and with each successive revision of the Treaty, that assumption is carried further and deeper. Yet it rests, when examined, on the shakiest of foundations. Privatisation is necessary, we are told, because state-run enterprises are inefficient. Yet there is no weight of evidence in favour of this view, and none is regarded as necessary. A political viewpoint which once had to compete with others now has the field to itself, transformed into a self-evident truth.

It is a 'truth' which guides the behaviour of the great institutions which run the system at global level - the IMF, World Bank, WTO and so on - and in huge 'regions': NAFTA for North America, Mercosur for Latin America, ASEAN for the far east and the European Union for a growing area of Europe. Of these, the EU is by far the most highly developed, and the one whose agenda most closely resembles that of the WTO. Yet the World Trade Organisation is greeted with universal hostility by those on the left of politics or in the green movement, whilst resistance to the EU is seen, if only in the English-speaking world, as anti-internationalist and inward-looking.

Let me then finish by summarising why, as someone whose thinking and practice have been shaped by the traditions of the anti-capitalist left, I am also an opponent of this European Union.

Firstly, its institutions and their basis in the Treaty of Rome and its amending treaties, remove power ever further from the people. The policies pursued by member state governments are

increasingly constrained by EU rules which oblige them to impose a 'free market' logic on ever-broader areas of the economy. Decisions are taken by remote institutions – the European Central Bank, the European Commission, the Court of Justice – which are unelected and, with the partial exception of the Commission, not answerable to anyone who is elected. This means that the ballot box no longer offers a way to bring about any fundamental change in the direction of policy. The Council of Ministers, which at least represents elected governments, meets behind close doors and has the power, in more and more instances, to impose policies on peoples whose parliaments have never been given the chance to approve or disapprove them. The European Parliament is so remote an institution that a slight majority of the EU electorate does not bother to exercise its right to vote in elections to it. The idea, still current in anti-EU circles, that the EP is a talking shop with no real power is outdated. Yet the increase in its powers has done nothing to democratise the Union, because its growing powers have been gained at the expense not of the Union's unelected authorities but by further reducing those of the member states and their parliaments. Furthermore, its remoteness (and that of the Commission), in both geographic and cultural terms, from the lives of the vast majority of citizens tilts the balance of influence away from popular institutions and democratic civil society and towards big corporations. It is the multi-nationals which have the resources to keep up a permanent lobbying clamour in Brussels and Strasbourg, a degree and style of pressure which is utterly disrespectful to the democratic process and ultimately subversive of it. From top to bottom the Commission and Parliament are imbued with such an elitist, technocratic worldview that they are not even aware of it. Despite valiant efforts from environmentalist, social and other NGOs, legislation which furthers the interests of the people rather than those of corporate capital almost never appears except as a result of one of two things: a crisis, such as the BSE scandal, which threatens to destroy hundreds of thousands of livelihoods and clearly had no other cause than an astonishing elitist arrogance, can provoke emergency action which may or may not include an effective remedy; or the need to mediate between competing national industries can lead to higher standards of, say, health and safety in the workplace, being imposed upon lagging countries. It would be overly pessimistic to say that sustained campaigning can never gain anything without one of these circumstances being present; and it would be wrong to pretend that national political institutions represent some ideal of democracy. What is certainly true, however, is that the EU has removed power from national institutions which can be understood, talked to and influenced, to a labyrinth of remote bodies in faraway places.

These aspects of the Union have their effects across the board of policies and programmes for which it is responsible. Enlargement of the EU is not a means of bringing the two formerly divided halves of Europe into a harmonious whole; on the contrary, it is the latest of the spoils of what was proclaimed as the West's "victory" in the Cold War. Democracy was, it is true, much more in evidence to the west of the Iron Curtain than it was in the Eastern bloc. Until the dying days of the Soviet system, however, democracy was defined in large part as a political system which allowed people to choose between competing economic systems: market-based capitalism, state socialism, a mixed economy on social democratic lines, or some combination of these. Freedom of expression, of the press, of assembly and so on, were secondary to this, necessary because clearly political democracy cannot function without them. Now, however, these freedoms, together with a multi-party parliamentary system, are the very definition of democracy, which is the automatic and unvarying political adjunct of a free market economy. Countries which lived in former times in the shadow of the USSR are now 'free' to join the European Union and adopt a particular, somewhat extreme version of market capitalism as their economic system. Once in, their electorates will have no opportunity to change this system through constitutional means. Of course, they may stay outside the EU and the WTO, but if they do so no-one will trade with them. They will therefore almost certainly opt to join, hoping that the corrupt, chaotic, nepotistic and gangsterish version of capitalism which has replaced repressive state socialism will somehow be modified by being 'in Europe'.



Meanwhile, should absorption of all of the countries to its immediate east not come off, or to police the new Iron Curtain which will be erected if and when it does, the Union, this supposed guarantee of peace, steadily develops a military capability. If the system through which other policies are determined leaves a lot, from a democratic viewpoint, to be desired, the Common Foreign and Security Policy must take the prize. Based on an assumption that there exist such things as common European values, and that fundamental to these is the 'market economy', the CFSP is designed to allow the establishment of an EU armed force to protect the economic and political interests of the Union's most powerful member states. This is what is meant by 'stability', of course: a framework in which foreign corporations can make money. Together with the promotion of a vibrant, competitive arms industry this is the CFSP's purpose.

The EU is also about maintaining internal order, as is clear from a reading of the Treaty of Amsterdam and much, most of it supportive, that has been written since that Treaty was signed. The "Third Pillar" tentatively introduced at Maastricht and hugely reinforced in Amsterdam represents a major inroad into what have been, after foreign policy, the most jealously guarded national competences: justice, the criminal law, immigration and refugee policy, and other aspects of what are tellingly known as "home affairs". Again, decisions are taken in an atmosphere of secrecy and elected assemblies at national and EU level excluded from the process. Bogus conceptions of citizenship are written into the Treaty, a meaningless Charter of Citizens Rights agreed which imposes absolutely no new obligations on any of its signatories, and thus a blank cheque written to the future. What the Union will require of us now we are all its citizens is, of course, unknown, but when such decisions are taken we will have no involvement in them.

Probably the biggest single act of subversion of democracy committed in the name of the European Union has been the establishment of the single currency, the euro. The Maastricht Treaty's convergence criteria for admission to the single currency and the rules for participation exactly follow the Washington consensus, obliging member states to respect very narrow, arbitrarily established limits on public borrowing and debt, to submit to a common interest rate which may be utterly inimical to their actual needs, and to prioritise low inflation as a policy target: to follow, in other words, a particular idea of fiscal prudence. These rules are impervious to electoral change, and they are imposed by an unelected board of central bankers, possibly the narrowest ruling elite in history. Macro-economic policy before the euro was decided by elected politicians and central banks which were, in most countries, directly answerable to them. Since the introduction of the single currency it is determined by a Central Bank constitutionally defined as 'independent', one which those same elected politicians are forbidden by the Treaty even to seek to influence. Interesting choice of word, that 'independent'. In the context it means that it is able to operate entirely free of any constitutionally-sanctioned interference from the people or their elected representatives, yet I have yet to see it used to describe Stalin, or Hitler, or the Sultan of Brunei. The defence, of course, of this dictatorial system is that ordinary people and politicians simply don't understand how the economy works and would get it all wrong. This attitude, known as 'technocratic', can, of course, equally be applied to other areas of policy, for what do non-specialists know about how to run a school or a hospital, about whether bio-technologies are safe, whether that new motorway is really needed or that forest really did have to be felled? Macro-economics is not in any obvious way a more difficult discipline than ecology, or health care economics, or plant biology; so why not apply the same logic to them and let experts decide everything?

The answer, of course, is that in democratic societies the people, and even the politicians, being ordinary mortals with limited knowledge and specialisms, cannot possibly decide every aspect of policy. What they can do, however, and what democracy, when it is genuine and functioning, allows them to do, is to establish policy goals. It is then the task of experts to work out how such goals can be achieved. It is precisely this right which the single currency, and the single internal market which

it was designed, in part, to underpin, remove from the peoples of the member states.

In its relationships with the rest of the world, where its highly selective commitment to free trade and its protectionism in defence of EU-based industries have contributed much to the underdevelopment which has afflicted many of its poorer trading partners in the last three decades, the Union demonstrates a merely rhetorical awareness of the imbalance of power between North and South and the dangers this holds for both. In reality, it acts quite unrestrainedly in pursuit of the short-term interests of European owners of capital.

Its employment and social policies have been entirely ineffective in reducing either unemployment or the growing social divide, which interestingly has been most marked in what are seen as the most 'successful' economies, those in which growth has been most rapid and sustained, the Netherlands and Ireland. Its much-vaunted environmental policies have done little or nothing to redress the damage wrought by Common Agricultural, Transport and Fisheries Policies, the last of which may just take the prize for the most disastrous of EU measures, though competition is stiff.

The integrationist answer to everything is invariably ever greater transfer of power from nation state to Union institution. The method is to take an obvious statement - that environmental problems require cross-border solutions; that the globalised economy demands international co-operation if it is not to be controlled by the unrestrained, beyond-the-law actions of corporate cowboys; that a large market and a unified currency hold advantages - and draw from it plausible sounding but specious conclusions. Simply because an international approach to the problems facing humanity in the twenty first century does not mean that this international approach, this European Union, a single currency based on discredited and extreme monetarist principles, a political system which seems almost designed to maximise corruption and the hegemony of wealthy elites, are the only or best forms of international co-operation on offer.

If we are to develop genuinely international institutions which enable cooperation to take place whilst preserving the democratic rights of the peoples of different nations, then we must set about a root-and-branch re-examination and reconstruction of global governance. What cannot be reformed should be discarded, and what can be put to the service of the people should be. The European Union in its present form is an obstacle to real co-operation across borders of language, culture and history. Its likely result is an ever-growing divide between those who exercise power and those who must suffer the consequences of decisions taken by them. Though this may be the intention of some involved in the integrationist project, they are unlikely to enjoy the consequences. A people denied peaceful means to bring about change can become apathetic, but sometimes it reacts in quite a different way. They have even been known to dissolve long-standing Unions, reject the counsel of technocrats, and tear down walls.

**Steven P. McGiffen**

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**P.S.**

\* <http://www.spectrezine.org/europe/mcgiffenEU.htm>

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