

# EUROPEAN UNION

# THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS

50+ TOP THINKERS SET OUT  
THEIR IDEAS FOR EUROPE



March 2007



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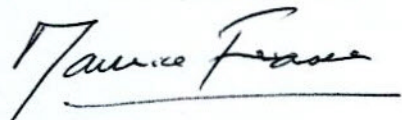
MAURICE FRASER

**F**ifty years ago, the representatives of six European countries gathered in Rome. The Treaty they signed paved the way for an experiment unique in history. Henceforth, proud nation states with competing – and often conflicting – interests would resolve their disputes without resort to threats, blackmail and war, within a framework which all would regard as binding. In short, they agreed to place themselves under the law.

To be sure, it was a calculation of rational self-interest. But it was also the explicit recognition of a shared inheritance of values without which the experiment would be doomed to failure. Foremost amongst those values has been the idea of freedom and the dignity of the individual, with its attendant rights and duties. The magnetic pull of these freedoms – to travel and to trade, to speak and to publish, to criticise and to worship – are the reasons why the European Community, now the European Union, has grown from six members to 27. Others keenly await their turn.

The writers in this book, and the young voices also represented, are nationals of all 27 member states and beyond. They offer a broad spectrum of perspectives, along with specific ideas for rekindling the idea of Europe amidst the present malaise and uncertainty. But certain themes and aspirations return insistently: above all, the precious nature of the EU's achievement, but also its fragility. Should that inheritance be protected or extended? If the latter, where, if anywhere, should the Union draw its final frontier? How is it to overcome demographic decline, reverse economic underperformance, tackle climate change and project its power effectively for the good of mankind? How is it to keep faith with its indifferent or sceptical citizens? Last but not least, how is it to safeguard its soul and its identity?

No one proposal in these pages could provide a definitive answer to the Union's problems. But in their range, their passion and their ingenuity, these essays tell us why the European Union has the means of its own preservation – and renewal.



Editor  
March 2007

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★ The European Union should avoid high-flown rhetoric and concentrate on what it is remarkably good at – finding pragmatic solutions and delivering practical benefits to its citizens

# Beyond the grand illusion



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**A**s we reflect on a half-century of success, the time has come to bring the European Union's rhetoric into line with reality. Pundits today herald its stagnation and collapse, and criticise its elitism and inefficiency. Unrepentant federalists believe the only hope is to stage yet another grand debate on European constitutional values, followed by another referendum, perhaps this time on a continental scale.

Yet to judge by substance rather than spin, the European Union is a remarkable success. The last decade surely ranks as its best: 12 new members, the Euro, a deepening single market and increasingly coherent internal security policies. Balkan enlargement proceeds, Turkish accession remains alive, positive influences are felt from Ukraine to Morocco, a pragmatic policy toward Iran has emerged, and EU anti-terrorism policy garners American praise. Across Europe, the EU's public trust and popularity exceeds that of national institutions.

More fundamentally, European cooperation now rests on a stable 'constitutional settlement' – a pragmatic consensus, grounded in the amended Treaty of Rome, on the powers and limits of the EU. No functional *grand projet*, akin to the single market or single currency, threatens massive constitutional change. Frustrated leftists dream of a European social policy, but advance no plausible proposals. Europeans find a US-style military neither attractive nor affordable. Taxes, healthcare, pensions, education, culture, infrastructure and even most immigration matters seem destined to

remain mostly national. Polls reveal support for the EU's concrete successes and approval of its current powers – modest increases in foreign policy and regulatory powers aside. Those who drafted the proposed constitution merely consolidated the status quo with a few

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## European cooperation now rests on a stable 'constitutional settlement'

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reasonable improvements: modest foreign policy reform, reallocated voting weights and reform of the rotating presidency. Proposals to revive reform in 2009 envisage even less. For the foreseeable future, Europe's constitutional order will remain substantially as is – a legitimate and limited political system.

### The perils of old-style idealism

Yet if Europe enjoys an enduring and effective constitutional government, what explains the widespread rhetoric of crisis?

The answer is embedded in the EU's unique history. Fifty years ago, Europeans saw integration as an idealistic means to transcend 20th century tragedies: two World Wars, Franco-German feuding, vicious nationalism, the fascist and communist threats, and inter-war economic collapse. The depth of Europe's inter-war suffering elicited not just bold proposals but radical rhetoric. The 'European movement' coalesced around Monnet and Schuman's ideal of





### Unity in diversity

At 50 years of age, older than most existing democracies, the EU is now a mature constitutional system. Mature polities no longer need to legitimate themselves by seeking 'ever closer union'. More appropriate to the phase of stability Europe has entered is the phrase that replaced it in the preamble to the draft constitution: 'unity in diversity'. On this basis, Europeans can construct a new discourse of national interest, pragmatic cooperation and constitutional consensus – a discourse that portrays Europe as it really is, for its second half-century.

progressively replacing national governments with a supranational state: a 'grand illusion' at the heart of Europe.

For 50 years, the vocal minority of European enthusiasts have lived this legacy. Few openly advocate a European 'superstate', but most reflexively support deeper integration, with little regard for the appropriateness of a particular policy. Onestill hears that without new policies, the EU will collapse – the Orwellian 'bicycle theory' coined by the first Commission President, Walter Hallstein.

Such 1950s-era rhetoric has become an albatross around Europe's neck. Talk of rekindling European idealism can prove a dangerous delusion, as recent constitutional debates demonstrated. The constitution's content was modest and sensible. But prominent pro-Europeans oversold it with grandiose rhetoric and criticism of existing EU policies, while failing to impose explicit limits on European governance. The moderate pro-EU majority of European citizens, whose primary attachment still belongs to the nation-state, reacted with confusion, suspicion and alarm. Radical eurosceptics easily hijacked referendum debates, driving discussion to the lowest common denominator: suspicion of domestic political elites, hatred of foreigners, and sterile ideological disputes. Only a tiny minority of French and Dutch voters cast ballots based on any aspect of EU policy – or are ever likely to do so. The bread-and-butter issues Europeans care about most – taxation, social welfare, healthcare, pensions, education, labour market reform, small-business regulation and infrastructure – remain essentially national. Little domestic electoral backlash – let alone popular pressure to leave the Union – is likely to emerge.

In lieu of rhetorical appeals, Europe should promulgate concrete and functional policies – a pragmatic 'Europe of results'. Promising opportunities exist in foreign policy, R&D, defence procurement, patent procedures and Balkan enlargement. Flexible cooperation with fewer than 25 members works well in money and counter-terrorism. It might be extended to tax and fiscal cooperation. Constitutional reforms should remain modest and reassuring.

### Wanted: a new discourse

Yet, pragmatism is not enough. After 50 years, it is time for Europe to transcend the dysfunctional rhetoric of its founders. Among pro-European elites, pragmatism is widely viewed as 'politically incorrect'. So Europe needs a new story, one that inspires idealism, but is consistent with the stable polity Europe has become. There need be no shameful compromise of principle in heralding pragmatic achievements like market integration, regulatory convergence, and foreign policy cooperation. And Europe's institutional achievements have a nobility all their own. They are of world-historical importance.

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## Europe is the most successful experiment in voluntary international cooperation yet known

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Europe is the most successful experiment in voluntary international cooperation yet known to man. Europe's neighbours prize membership so highly that EU accession has emerged as the most effective instrument Western governments possess to promote global peace and security, while also demonstrating the multi-cultural potential of the European ideal. Using membership, as well as foreign aid, peacekeeping, international law, social democratic ideals and trade conditionality, the EU demonstrates daily the narrowness of the neo-conservative obsession with military might found in unilateralist America.

The EU is also the only successful new form of state organisation to emerge since the rise of the welfare state in the late 19th century. Its unique genius lies in the way it fosters deep international cooperation while respecting the powerful rhetoric and symbols that still attach to national identity. A wide range of checks and balances, backed by severe constitutional limitations on EU power, respond to varied democratic pressures. Europe demonstrates that intensive international cooperation is consistent with limited government, democratic control and cultural diversity.