BOOK REVIEWS

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Ramiro Troitiño, David. *European Integration: Building Europe*, New York: Nova Publishers, 2013, 352pp.

At a time when the EU is experiencing its deepest crisis hitherto, a book that tries to take stock of the entire process of European integration from its post-war beginnings to the present is more than welcome. Ramiro's monograph is divided into 33 chapters, devoted to the institutions of the European Union (EU), its policies, and to crucial events in its history such as the various enlargements and treaty revisions. One chapter each is devoted to individual politicians that have exerted a crucial influence on the development of the EU, namely Charles de Gaulle, Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl, although no separate chapters are included for what Alan Milward (1993, Ch. 6) has jokingly called the European saints, Spaak, de Gasperi, Schumann and Monnet. Perhaps the European Court of Justice and European development policies would have merited separate chapters; after all, the latter was an explicit attempt to develop a distinct European view in contradistinction to the approach of the USA, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). But these are minor omissions in a book that provides a truly comprehensive overview of European integration.

The admirable breadth of the book, however, does come at the price of depth. There is a specialised literature on virtually all of the individual chapter topics but the text frequently ignores much of it. Take, for example, Chapter 3 on the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Ramiro argues that the organisation was driven by the will to focus on the common good and was of huge importance for the future development of European integration (pp. 20–21). Those points are not necessarily shared by detailed historical studies such as Gillingham (1991), Milward (1993, Ch. 3) and a more recent and equally careful study by two political scientists (Alter & Steinberg, 2007), but none of these studies are even given a mention. The point here is not that Ramiro is wrong, but that his views, which are frequently very close to the official EU historiography, would have been more convincing had he engaged more with the available in-depth studies of specific aspects of European integration.

Although they are discussed briefly in Chapter 2 and put in an occasional appearance in the rest of the book, unlike most other comprehensive texts

written by political scientists (e.g., Bache & George, 2006; Cini, 2003), Ramiro spends little time on theories of integration, let alone trying to “test” them against the evidence. Some political scientists may consider this a shortcoming but in fact it would seem a refreshing departure from what has come to be standard practice. Long after historians have discarded the effort as futile, theorists of European integration, be they (neo-[neo-]) functionalists or (neo-[liberal-]) intergovernmentalists, de facto are engaged in an attempt to develop a theory of history but end up in sectarian debates about a set of approaches made unfalsifiable by judicious fiddling with time frames and the use of auxiliary assumptions, Mark Gilbert rightly has called this “abstraction run mad” (Gilbert, 2008, p. 650). Thus, Ramiro’s decision to give relatively short shrift to the theoretical debates about the course of European integration greatly adds to the readability and usefulness of the text, especially for readers from outside the narrow field of European integration studies.

What the EU currently needs most of all is an informed normative debate about its future rather than positive “scientific theories”, and the book provides ample food for thought in this respect. Ramiro’s position comes down to arguing that the EU is in need of an ever closer Union. However, and this may be the weakest point of the whole text, the position that closer integration is the panacea for all of Europe’s ailments will remain a mere article of faith if it is not backed up by a discussion of those analyses that might serve to cast some doubt on this certainty. Take for example the issue of European identity (Ch. 27), which Ramiro correctly identifies as crucial for the future of integration. Given the deep divisions that manifested themselves so clearly over the US invasion of Iraq, one might doubt that a common defence policy “would without any doubt increase the European identity of the people protected” (p. 263).

One might equally wish to question the statements that returning some competences to the Member States is historically not possible (p. 278) and that “until now the euro has been one of the strongest vehicles to create European Identity because, despite a general rise of prices with its adoption, the euro is surviving well during the current financial crisis” (p. 261). The facts are that, in terms of GDP growth, the eurozone is performing worse than the rest of the EU and, indeed, worse than any other region of the global economy (IMF, 2013, Table 1.1, p. 2) while the euro crisis has provided abundant fuel for Eurosceptic parties such as the True Finns, the Dutch *Partij voor de Vrijheid* and the *Alternative für Deutschland*. Perhaps the argument that a common currency for the EU might not be the best route towards an ever closer union could do with a more sophisticated analysis before being discarded.

Overall, Ramiro has written an impressive overview of virtually all aspects of European integration since its inception. The various chapters of the book might serve well in undergraduate classes as a first introduction to the manifold aspects of European integration.

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