

The Preamble of the Treaty of Rome: 60 years later, what conclusions can be drawn?

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The Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (the more emblematic of the two Treaties of Rome) gave life and body to the ideal of European integration that had been sketched in particular by Victor Hugo. Sixty years after its signature, here is a brief commentary, necessarily subjective, on the Preamble of this founding text (the past and present participles that open each paragraph of the text refer to the six heads of state and government who were signatories to the Treaty on 25 March 1957).

Determined to lay the foundations of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe,

There are at least two possible readings of the objective referred to in the first paragraph of the EEC Treaty. The first sees in the “union” of “peoples” the union of their governments, and from this perspective it seems very difficult to dispute that since 1957 the European executive authorities have come together and now collaborate closely, with new elements of their sovereignty pooled. But the injunction of Jean Monnet, one of the principal architects of the Treaty, should not be forgotten: “our mission is not to unite states, but to unite people”. What, then, is to be said of the union of nations? A number of more or less anecdotal surveys seem to indicate that [stereotypes die hard in Europe](#) and that Europeans still do not know each other very well.

More fundamentally, it is the confidence placed by Europeans in their union that seems to be a relevant indicator of how solid it is [\[1\]](#). The Eurobarometer of autumn 2016 (published

in December 2016) indicates that confidence in the EU has fallen to 36%, almost fifteen points below its 2004 level (according to Eurostat data, confidence in European institutions fell from 53% in 2000 to 42% in 2014). It is from 2011 that a majority of citizens began to turn away from the European Union, at a time, one might think, when the EU Member States were proving resolutely incapable of proposing a coordinated and effective strategy to get out of the crisis and when the bloc was once again plunging into recession. Confidence in the EU is lower in the euro area than in the non-euro countries, and it is particularly low in the major signatories of the EEC Treaty – Germany, France and Italy – where it fails to rise above 30%.

Resolved to ensure the economic and social progress of their countries by common action to eliminate the barriers which divide Europe,

The central tenet of Europe's strategy over the post-World War 2 years is set out here: by creating and consolidating the "four freedoms" of circulation (of goods, services, capital and persons) and steadily forming a European internal market, called a single market in the 1990s), the drafters intended to promote the prosperity of nations and to break down the mental barriers that have so deeply divided Europeans. The result, sixty years later, is an asymmetric integration: mobility, while high for goods and especially capital, remains low for people and services. Article 117 of the Treaty, which aims at "equalization in the progress" of living conditions, envisages that this will be achieved by the "functioning of the common market, which will promote the harmonization of social systems". Europe's asymmetric integration has instead generated fierce tax and social competition. However, Europeans are strongly attached to their respective social models: according to the Eurobarometer, 82% of them believe that "the market economy should go hand in hand with a high level of social protection". Sixty years after the signing of

the Treaty of Rome, if a European identity does indeed exist, it is centred on this belief.

But while for decades the free movement of people, structurally weak in the EU, has had only a marginal presence in European debates, it played a central role in the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the EU: whereas the British intended to propose a trade-off between the free movement of goods, capital and services, which they intended to keep, and the free movement of people, which they no longer want, the EU's institutions and Member States reaffirmed that the four freedoms form a bloc, to be taken or left together.

Affirming as the essential objective of their efforts the constant improvement of the living and working conditions of their peoples,

There is little doubt that Europeans' living conditions have improved since 1957, but their "constant improvement", affirmed as an "essential goal" by the Treaty of Rome, has come into question empirically in the recent period. According to the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) [\[2\]](#), an imperfect measure that partly reflects people's living conditions, the situation in European countries, which can be assessed only since 1990 (the date when homogeneous data became available for the EU-28), indicates almost constant progress in the member countries up to 2000, the turning point after which the rate of HDI growth slows, falling to almost zero in 2014. "Employment conditions", which are approximated by the unemployment rate, have also deteriorated since 2000, with the unemployment rate recovering to its 2000 level only in 2016.

But the essential point is undoubtedly the way that Europeans today perceive the possibility of their living conditions improving. The Eurobarometer says that 56% of Europeans now believe that their children will lead harder lives than they did. According to data from the Pew Research Center, [Europeans](#)

are now the most pessimistic in the world in terms of their economic future.

Recognising that the removal of existing obstacles calls for concerted action in order to guarantee steady expansion, balanced trade and fair competition,

Anxious to strengthen the unity of their economies and to ensure their harmonious development by reducing the differences existing between the various regions and the backwardness of the less favoured regions,

These two paragraphs are aimed at averting two imbalances in Europe, which have in fact been reinforced in recent times: current account imbalances (going against “balanced trade”) and geographical imbalances (undermining the “harmonious development” of the territories of the European Union). On the first point, trade imbalances between EU Member States and in the euro area in particular are now well known and documented, as is the major destabilizing role being played by Germany. On the second point, the success of the single market inherited from the Treaty of Rome has been paradoxical: it brought countries closer together but led to divergence between the regions (and more generally the territories). It can for instance be shown that in the European Union the gap in economic development between regions is stronger than the gap between countries [3]. This spatial fracture within Europe’s countries, which is found in other countries outside Europe but which the single market has undoubtedly accentuated by the powerful agglomeration effects it generates, is not without consequence for the geographical polarization observed in recent polls, in the United Kingdom, Austria and France.

Desiring to contribute, by means of a common commercial policy, to the progressive abolition of restrictions on international trade,

The drafters of the Treaty of Rome were right: the EEC and

then the EU have contributed greatly to the liberalization of trade around the planet and therefore to contemporary globalization. While in 1960 the six EEC Treaty countries represented about a quarter of world trade, by 2015 the 28 EU countries accounted for about 34% of world trade. One-third of globalization has involved Europeanization.

Intending to confirm the solidarity which binds Europe and the overseas countries and desiring to ensure the development of their prosperity, in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations,

Resolved by thus pooling their resources to preserve and strengthen peace and liberty, and calling upon the other peoples of Europe who share their ideal to join in their efforts,

Have decided to create a European Economic Community...

This last section sets out the heart of the European promise: peace based on a market that relies on the law and calls forth enlargement. There is no denying that civil liberties and political rights have progressed on the continent, guaranteeing the Member States the longest period unbroken by war since the sixteenth century. In 1957, only 12 of the current 28 Member States were democracies – all are today. And democracies are far less prone to war than other political regimes. It is no exaggeration to say that Europe is today the most democratic continent in the world, with almost 90% of its countries considered free, compared with only 70% in the Americas, 40% in Asia, 20% in sub-Saharan Africa and only 1% in the Middle East and North Africa (according to data from Freedom House). But the threat has changed in nature: it is no longer primarily international conflict that endangers Europe (although the new Russian imperialism cannot be taken lightly), but internal conflict.

Political instability, already evident in Greece, is rising in

many countries, in Austria, the Netherlands, Finland, Italy and of course France. The European Union has contributed to the deep social resentment that is feeding the very secessionist parties that intend to dismantle it. The response to this risk of disintegration must be on a par with the Treaty of Rome, whose preamble affirms values [\[1\]](#) and sets out horizons. In this respect, the European Commission's tribute is contradictory: the [White Paper on the future of Europe](#), released on 1 March, considers the question of what Europeans want to do together and how they could do it, together or separately. But for the first time in sixty years, the Union is not expanding but shrinking. For the first time in sixty years, Europeans believe their children will have harder lives than they did. For the first time in sixty years, democracy is being threatened on the continent and, aggravating this situation, from within. The greatest danger for European construction is not the crisis: it is complacency about the crisis.

[\[1\]](#) The Eurobarometer, created in the spring of 1974, measures confidence in European institutions and the European Union, and is intended to reveal Europeans to one another through the expression of their respective public opinions.

[\[2\]](#) The HDI aggregates indicators on health, education and income on a parity basis.

[\[3\]](#) If the special case of Luxembourg is left out.