

Domestic Political Realities and European Unification

A Study of Mass Publics and Elites
in the European Community Countries

Werner J. Feld and John K. Wildgen



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Werner J. Feld and John K. Wildgen have undertaken the first comparative analysis of mass public and elite attitudes relating to European unification in all nine member states of the European Community. Utilizing advanced statistical methods, their study reveals that, for the mass public, nationality is the most significant variable explaining the different levels of unification support. They have also found that there is a distinct difference between attitudes that relate to Community performance and to its future institutional growth. In terms of political-party identification as a variable, the authors discovered that political activism is more significant as an explanatory variable than is merely party identification. Interviews with elites in the political sphere revealed that attitudes in support of unification are soft. Indeed, while among the political and administrative elites fairly widespread support for unification is expressed, the interviews suggested that in many cases "a politics of rejection" is practiced.

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INTRODUCTION

That the progress of the European unification process, so vigorously begun in the 1950s, has come to a virtual standstill, is hardly newsworthy today. But what remains interesting is the fact that important initiatives launched by the highest leaders of government in the member states of the European Community (EC) to stimulate progress toward European unity, have fizzled or may encounter strong opposition. A striking example of such initiative is the plan to establish an economic and monetary union (EMU). During the Summit Meeting of EC heads of government in December of 1969 it was announced with much fanfare that the creation of the EMU should become a high priority goal of the EC member states. In March 1971 the EC Council of Ministers confirmed this objective by declaring that by 1978 the Community was to "form an individual monetary unit within the international system."¹ Three stages of development were envisaged with transitions from one stage to the next set for specific years (1973, 1975, and 1978). However, these deadlines were not maintained and most observers feel now that the prospects for an EMU are very dim.

Another example is the direct election of the European Parliament (EP), the weakest major institution of the Community, whose members at present are elected or appointed by the national legislatures of the EC member states. The December 1975 European Council (as the Summit Meetings of the heads of government are called now) agreed that beginning in May or June 1978 the election of the European Parliament should be held on one date only and that it should be a direct election. Britain and Denmark had strong reservations about direct elections and were authorized to use the current method for the

¹ Fifth General Report of the European Communities (1971), p. 137.

nomination of EP deputies. The EC Council of Ministers was to prepare the groundwork for a convention for direct EP elections which has to be ratified by the national legislatures.² But only a few days after the European Council meeting, strong opposition to the direct elections surfaced in French parliamentary circles, especially the UDR, and comparisons were drawn between the fate of these elections and the successful scuttling of the 1952 European Defense Community Treaty in the French Assembly in 1954.³

What are the reasons for the difficulties in moving Western Europe toward political unity? Can they be explained by the major theories on regional integration?⁴

In a very interesting monograph entitled "The Obsolescence of Regional Integration Theory", Ernst Haas said the following:

...The theories we have developed for describing, explaining, and predicting regional integration, however, have a tendency not to predict very accurately the events which come about, and not to explain very convincingly why events which were predicted did come about in fact. It has been suggested that we can probably devise better theories which would lead to more dependable findings. But I shall argue that the effort is probably not worth our while. Events in the world and conceptual developments

² Agence Europe Bulletin, December 4, 1975.

³ See Agence Europe Bulletin, December 10, 1975.

⁴ Cf. Ernst B. Haas, The Uniting of Europe (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1958); Ernst B. Haas and Phillippe C. Schmitter, "Economic and Differential Patterns of Political Integration: Projections About Unity in Latin America," International Organization, Vol. 18 (Autumn 1964), pp. 705-737; Leon N. Lindberg and Stuart A. Scheingold, Europe's Would-Be Polity (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970); Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Comparative Regional Integration: Concept and Measurement," International Organization XXII (Autumn 1968), pp. 855-880; and the entire Autumn 1970 issue of International Organization (Vol. XXIV, No. 4); Amitai Etzioni, Political Unification (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965); Philip E. Jacob and James V. Toscano, eds., The Integration of Political Communities (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1964); and Charles Pentland, International Theory and European Integration (New York: The Free Press, 1973).

in social science have conspired to suggest that the name of the game has changed, and that more interesting themes ought to be explored. These themes--grossly captured in the terms interdependence and systems change--can profit from incorporation of aspects of the theory of regional integration. But they are sufficiently different in scope and portent from integration as to suggest that theorizing about it is no longer profitable as a distinct and self-conscious intellectual pursuit. In this sense--and in this sense alone--regional integration theory is obsolescent. Its concepts, methods, and assumptions continue to be applicable to many settings and processes. However, it now seems that the core conceptualization, which was developed in the empirical setting of Western Europe, is least applicable in that part of the world, and that the reconceptualization made necessary by events in Western Europe will eventually infect other parts of the world where the older theories still retain relevance. In essence, I argue that the familiar regional integration theories are obsolete in Western Europe and obsolescent--though still useful--in the rest of the world.⁵

Apart from the reference to the continued relevance of theory to integration efforts in "other parts of the world" -- we see very little evidence that at least the functionalist concepts retain much applicability in Latin America and Africa⁶ -- we agree with Haas that much rethinking is necessary about the theoretical concepts that fit the Western European experience in integration. At the same time, we think that the Haas statement in his work is appropriate in which he rejects the argument that the present mixed institutional structure of the European Community is likely to continue indefinitely. He may well be right that the "half-way house cannot last, for substantive as well as procedural reasons."⁷ Either, the process of political integration

⁵Published by the Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1975, p. 1.

⁶The references cited in ibid. footnotes 7-9 do not seem to offer much support to his contention.

⁷Ibid., p. 79.

moves forward, however haltingly, or the EC institutions will become parts of a Europe-wide intergovernmental coordination process with the concept of a governmentally united Europe nothing more than a distant dream.

While we accept that incrementalism in the integration process is possible, it seems to us that understanding the dynamics of this process requires research in fields other than in those mildly suggested by the "logic of functionalism." One major goal of research on the European Community must be to determine who possesses the key positions to influence attitudes and expectations regarding the goals of integration, the formulation and implementation of regional policies, and the degree of legitimacy accorded to the Community institutions. A second research goal, closely related to the first, is the identification of crucial variables which are responsible for the integration process or may produce new directions in regional integration in Western Europe.

After having done a great deal of research into public opinion in the European Community countries, which we will report and discuss later, we feel that the public may often not care too much whether benefits it may receive or deprivations it may suffer come from the national governments or from the Community institutions in Brussels. On the other hand, it seems that specific interest groups and members of the national bureaucracies are very much concerned about the channels and institutions through which they may achieve their goals and about the threats or harm to their interests that may emanate from changes in decision-making powers.⁸ Perhaps the group most intimately concerned with and involved in the distribution of benefits and deprivations may be elected political leaders whose future careers may depend on their

⁸ See also Ibid., p. 86.

ability to analyze changing economic and social situations and to determine by careful cost-benefit calculations how Community-related events will affect them.

For the above reasons it seems to us that Peter Busch and Don Puchala perhaps look at the Community system with greater understanding and insight than those who somehow want to retain much of the functionalist framework for explaining what has happened in Western Europe during the last twenty five years and what may occur in the future. Busch and Puchala perceive regional integration as a set of those institutionalized processes whereby nation-states seek solutions to national problems through instrumentalities that represent and/or pertain to the region itself, and look at the European Community as a continuous system of linkages among various elites.⁹ We basically agree with this notion, but we may differ perhaps in our emphasis, since in our view the main focus must be on specific elites in the national political arenas of the member states. It is our contention that we must concentrate on analyzing the interests, aspirations, motivations, and behavior of elected politicians and middle and upper ranked national bureaucrats, and seek to assess their perceptions of the salience and seriousness of mass public demands relating to Community functions and manifestations. If we do this it may be possible to (1) obtain a realistic assessment of the linkages between the opinions of the mass public and the decisional behavior of political and administrative elites; (2) explain the policy-making in the Community system regardless whether regional policies are evolved by the central institutions in Brussels or by the national governments; (3) gain greater insights into the intricacies of the Community decision-making process as an interactional system of regional, national, and subnational governmental and nongovernment

⁹"Interest, Influence and Integration: Political Structure in the European Communities" (Mimeo).

institutions and forces; and (4) make some tentative, yet realistic, projections as to the direction toward which Western Europe may be moving in terms of greater or lesser political integration.

This study seeks to make a contribution to such an analysis and assessment by scrutinizing first the thrust and structure of public opinion as reflected in the surveys conducted under the auspices of the Community Commission during the last few years in the nine EC member states. The main source of data is the survey conducted in September 1973 during which 13,484 persons were interviewed.¹⁰ Our chief concern is the identification and interpretation of factors which explain the degree and variation of support for political unification with particular attention paid to the implications for domestic and regional politics present and future. This is followed by a thorough analysis of attitudes and behavior displayed by national political and administrative elites in the nine member states based on a series of 164 interviews with parliamentarians and appointed public officials. An attempt will be made to relate the elite data developed with mass public opinion data to determine similarities, differences, and mutual reinforcement. Finally, based on our findings, we will address ourselves to the evolution of Community policies taking into consideration the problem of linkages between attitude and behavior and attempting to speculate on policy propensities for the future.

¹⁰ See Commission des Communautés Européennes, *L'Europe vue par les Européens* (Brussels, August 1974); data available through ICPR, University of Michigan. The number of respondents per country are: Belgium 1266, Denmark 1199, France 2227, Ireland, 1199, Italy 1909, Luxembourg 330, The Netherlands 1464, United Kingdom 1933, and West Germany 1957.