

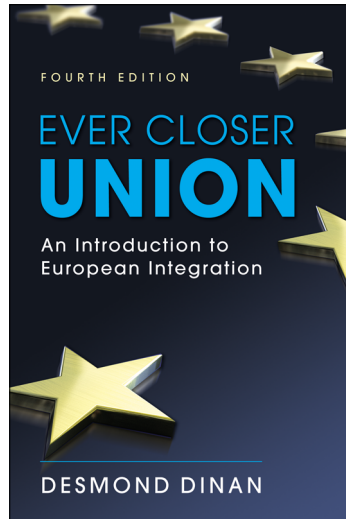
EXCERPTED FROM

Ever Closer Union:  
An Introduction to  
European Integration

FOURTH EDITION

Desmond Dinan

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ISBN: 978-1-58826-607-1 pb



LYNNE RIENNER PUBLISHERS

1800 30th Street, Ste. 314

Boulder, CO 80301

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This excerpt was downloaded from the  
Lynne Rienner Publishers website  
[www.rienner.com](http://www.rienner.com)

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# Introduction

The Lisbon Treaty, the latest and probably the last major revision of the foundational treaties of the European Union, came into effect in December 2009. The treaty took eight years to complete. Officials and politicians held an unprecedented Constitutional Convention; national governments conducted two negotiations on new treaty provisions; Dutch and French voters rejected the first proposed treaty; Irish voters rejected the follow-on Lisbon Treaty, then accepted it; and the president of the Czech Republic, a notorious Euroskeptic, refused to sign the treaty into law until the last possible moment. The entire episode showed how fraught the process of treaty reform had become and the touchiness of European integration for politicians and the public alike.

Before considering the implications of the treaty's lengthy gestation and difficult birth, it is worth asking why reform was necessary in the first place. The answer lies in the nature of the EU, a multifaceted, ever changing entity. The most significant changes affect its size and scope, which have expanded greatly following the end of the Cold War and the acceleration of globalization. Treaty reform helps the EU adapt to daunting internal and external challenges, not least the challenge of enlargement (see Box 0.1). The Lisbon Treaty is the fourth major treaty reform since 1992.

The background to this particular reform was the determination of EU leaders—in national governments and EU institutions alike—to streamline the EU; revise its institutional arrangements; strengthen its decisionmaking capacity; make it a credible international actor; clarify and in some cases extend its scope; and make the EU more accountable, appealing, and comprehensible to its citizens. EU leaders were reacting to the organization's manifest inadequacies in the face of growing public disillusionment with European integration, a membership that had more than doubled in less than fifteen years, rapid socioeconomic change, and a radically altered international environment.

Although a tall order, the rationale for a new round of reform therefore seems reasonable, even sensible. If so, why was the process so prolonged and painful? Why does the outcome—the treaty itself—look like a caricature of

**Box 0.1 The Ever Larger Union**

Original Member States (1958)	First Enlargement (1973)	Second Enlargement (1981)	Third Enlargement (1986)	Fourth Enlargement (1995)	Fifth Enlargement (2004–2007) <sup>a</sup>
Belgium France Germany Italy Luxembourg Netherlands	Britain Denmark Ireland	Greece	Portugal Spain	Austria Finland Sweden	Bulgaria (2007) Czech Republic Cyprus Estonia Hungary Latvia Lithuania Malta Poland Romania (2007) Slovakia Slovenia

Note: a. Ten countries joined the EU in 2004; Bulgaria and Romania joined in 2007.

the EU: unappetizing and impenetrable? Far from having produced a text that is simple, short, and inspiring, the treaty's authors drafted a document that is long, complicated, and difficult for experts, let alone intrepid lay readers, to understand.

The answer lies in the EU's complexity. The Lisbon Treaty is the latest layer to rest upon previous layers of treaty change, going back to the founding charters of the three European communities—the Coal and Steel Community, the Atomic Energy Community, and the European Economic Community—in the 1950s. Each layer has emerged from intensive negotiations among national governments over the realization of European integration in concrete institutional and policy terms. New treaty changes are path-dependent; they follow the course of preceding ones. Unable to start from scratch and possibly produce a short, simple, readable, and enduring document, national governments have found themselves revising previously revised treaties, adding declarations and protocols at each stage in order to gain a slight advantage and allay domestic concerns (see Box 0.2).

The saga and substance of the Lisbon Treaty and the Constitutional Treaty before it reveal much about the state of the EU more than sixty years after the first, tentative steps toward “ever closer union.” Clearly, treaty reform—changing the rules of what the EU does and how the EU does it—is extremely difficult. Governments care about the form and scope of European integration because potential losses and gains, and the domestic political stakes, are high. As European integration has intensified, the EU's impact on policy and politics has become far more conspicuous and important.

The EU is pervasive in people's lives. Residents of the euro area—the countries in which the common currency is used—are reminded of the EU's exist-

### Box 0.2 The Founding Treaties and Major Treaty Reforms

The Lisbon Treaty (2007) is the latest in a long series of reforms of the original treaties on which the EU is built: the Treaty Establishing the *European Coal and Steel Community* (Paris Treaty, 1951), and the Treaties Establishing the *European Economic Community* and the *European Atomic Energy Community* (Rome Treaties, 1957).

The Merger Treaty (formally the Brussels Treaty, 1965) reformed the three founding treaties.

The budget treaties include the Treaty Amending Certain Budgetary Provisions, signed in Luxembourg in 1970, and the Treaty Amending Certain Financial Provisions, signed in Brussels in 1975.

The Single European Act (1986) reformed the Treaty Establishing the European Economic Community.

The Maastricht Treaty (1992), formally the Treaty on *European Union*, established the EU and included a major reform of the Treaty Establishing the European Economic Community—renaming it the Treaty Establishing the *European Community*.

The Amsterdam Treaty (1997) reformed the Treaty Establishing the European Community and the Treaty on European Union.

The Nice Treaty (2001) reformed the Treaty Establishing the European Community and the Treaty on European Union.

The Lisbon Treaty reformed the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Establishing the European Community, renaming it the Treaty on the *Functioning of the European Union*.

*Note:* The years in parentheses indicate when the treaties were signed.

tence whenever they reach into their pockets and pull out notes and coins. The EU is also omnipresent in less obvious ways. Most regulation affecting everyday life, such as rules about product safety, food labeling, and environmental standards, is produced not in national capitals but by government officials and ministers, Commission officials, and members of the European Parliament working together in Brussels and Strasbourg. The rulings of the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg are shaping the legal landscape throughout Europe.

People tend to take for granted the benefits of European integration, such as unfettered cross-border travel, low roaming charges for cell phone use, and cheap air travel. Often oblivious to the economic growth generated by the existence of a large, EU-wide market, people fret about the fallout from globalization: they worry about job losses, downward pressure on wages and social services, and the rise of transnational crime, often seeing the EU as part of the problem rather than the solution. While wanting the EU to help strengthen internal and external security, many Europeans are either unaware or dismissive of the strides that governments have taken together regarding asylum and immigration, external border control, police and judicial cooperation, foreign policy, and international peace operations.



Referendums on treaty change give people an opportunity to express dissatisfaction with the EU by either voting against the proposed reform or not voting at all. Not that referendums on treaty change always end in defeat (voters in Luxembourg and Spain approved the Constitutional Treaty). Nevertheless, fear of defeat has made governments wary of putting painstakingly negotiated treaty reform before the electorate. Ireland was the only country to hold a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty because it was the only country whose own constitution obliged it to do so.

Many Europeans are mistrustful of the EU for other reasons. Its sheer size—comprising nearly thirty countries and 500 million people—is intimidating and offputting. The idea of a federal Europe, no matter how decentralized, is uncongenial to most Europeans. All politics are local, which in the context of European integration means national. People may not understand how national legislative procedures work, but generally accept the legitimacy of those procedures without question. People may not like national politicians, but tolerate them nonetheless, taking solace in the knowledge that if necessary they can throw the rascals out. Ordinary Europeans relate differently to the EU, considering it remote, technocratic, and unaccountable.

There are few proponents today of a United States of Europe, a possibility that exists only in the paranoid dreams of ardent Euroskeptics. Arguably the EU has reached equilibrium. It is best understood as an association of states that have pooled a great degree of national sovereignty in supranational institutions, thereby forming an entity with federal characteristics that is nonetheless well short of a full-fledged state. European integration is not static; it ebbs and flows according to national preferences and initiatives, institutional leadership and entrepreneurship, and prevailing regional and global circumstances. The balance established in the Lisbon Treaty between and among national governments and supranational actors (the Commission, the Parliament, and the Court) is unlikely to change fundamentally.

Such an elaborate organization exists for the simple reason that national governments believe that it is in their interest for it to exist. Although European countries differ greatly, they have enough in common, in terms of geography, history, and political culture, to agree that an entity such as the EU serves them well, or at least better than the alternative of either a looser regional organization or going it alone in an increasingly interdependent and turbulent world. Despite the frequent irritations and inconveniences of European integration, countries would not have formed or joined the EU unless they had calculated that belonging to a supranational entity would greatly increase national security and economic well-being.

For some people, the EU is anathema precisely because it involves the sharing of sovereignty, no matter how limited or circumscribed and no matter how pressing the reasons for it. In their view, sovereignty is sacrosanct and indivisible. Believers in the inviolability of sovereignty are found mostly in great powers such as China, India, and the United States, countries whose size

generally insulates them from having to cede power to others. Within the EU, proponents of that viewpoint are found mostly in Britain, a country with a markedly different historical experience and political culture from most other member states and one that continues to struggle with the philosophical and practical implications of European integration.

Opponents of European integration naturally exaggerate the threat that they think the EU poses to national identity, independence, and interests. In their mind, ever closer union is dangerous and undesirable, paving the way for a federal Europe. In reality, “ever closer union”—first used in the Rome Treaty of 1957—is a catchphrase for institutionalized European integration, a means of overcoming historical animosities, addressing common problems on a small and crowded continent, and strengthening regional stability. Ever closer union plays out in the daily grind of intensive transnationalism, involving endless, countless meetings among a host of public and private actors in the multilevel dance of EU governance. It is a far cry from incipient federalism or empire building.

To say that a federal United States of Europe is a chimera is not to deny the existence of an ideology of European integration, a belief that the sharing of sovereignty among European countries is inherently good and beneficial for the countries concerned and for the world as a whole. Proponents of this viewpoint believe passionately in what they call the European project and tend to conflate “Europe” with “European Union.” Just as national sovereignty is sacrosanct for many Euroskeptics, it is an abomination for many advocates of ever closer union.

The premise of this book is that European integration is a good thing, for practical, not ideological, reasons. On balance, European integration has benefited the countries concerned in ways that go well beyond narrow calculations of economic self-interest. The EU should be judged not by what it is and certainly not by what it says, but by what it does or what it fails to do. All politicians are prone to rhetorical flights of fancy. The atmosphere at summit meetings seems to lend itself to extravagant statements and impressive communiqués, in the G20 as much as in the European Council. What matters is the follow-through, whether a summit can generate sufficient political momentum to achieve concrete results. More broadly in the case of European integration, what matters is whether the EU’s elaborate policymaking procedures generate outcomes that improve the lives of Europeans and others.

It is impossible to know what Europe would look like without the EU. With the EU, the culmination of more than fifty years of European integration, Europe is more prosperous and secure than it has ever been. Yet coincidence is not causation. Just because the EU exists does not mean that Europe is better off because of it. Other developments and organizations, such as the movement for social justice or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, have been influential in shaping Europe today. Nevertheless, the EU is so deeply woven into the cultural, economic, political, and social fabric of contemporary Europe that it is impossible to deny the impact of European integration.

Critics would claim that such an impact has not necessarily been beneficial, that Europe would be better off without the EU or with a different kind of EU. Undoubtedly the EU as we know it has its faults and failings. Yet it is difficult to refute the benefits of the single market program or monetary union, let alone the achievement—little short of miraculous—of bringing the poor, unstable postcommunist countries of Central and Eastern Europe into the EU, and thus securely into a stable Western political and economic order. The institutions of the EU are by no means perfect, and the behavior of EU officials and politicians—like officials and politicians everywhere—is not beyond reproach, but the achievements of European integration are invaluable.

The purpose of this book is not to convince readers of the EU's virtues but to elucidate in a lively and comprehensive way what the EU is, how it came about, how it works, and what it does. The distinction among the European Economic Community, European Community, and European Union can be confusing (see Box 0.3). This book aims to clarify and explain the origins and development of the European communities and the conduct of the contemporary EU. The book is organized logically into three parts—history, institutions, and policies—but inevitably there is overlap among these somewhat artificial categories. For instance, the history part recounts institutional and policy developments; the institutions part explores policymaking processes; and the policies part mentions the roles of institutional actors. Nor is it possible to include every significant historical development, institutional feature, or policy issue in a book of this size. Nevertheless *Ever Closer Union* seeks to satisfy those who want a solid understanding of the EU while whetting their appetite for further inquiry.

### **Box 0.3 EEC, EC, or EU?**

The European Union (EU) came into existence in May 1993, following implementation of the Treaty on European Union, better known as the Maastricht Treaty. Among other things, the Maastricht Treaty changed the name of the European Economic Community (EEC) to the European Community (EC), although the acronym "EC" was already widely used to describe not only the EEC but also, collectively, the three original communities. After Maastricht, the EC became an integral part of the EU. Most policy areas—ranging from agriculture to monetary union—were conducted under the auspices of the EC, until implementation of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009 did away with the EC and brought every policy area under the auspices solely of the EU. In this book, "EEC" is used when referring specifically to activities relating to the original treaty that established the EEC, and "EC" is used when referring generally to developments before 1993. "EU" is used when referring to developments after implementation of the Maastricht Treaty, although "EU history" refers to the history of European integration since the launch of the original communities. At the risk of sacrificing accuracy for narrative flow, policies and decisions are attributed to the EU even when undertaken, strictly speaking, by the EC.