

The Maastricht Treaty: Negotiations and Consequences in Historical Perspective – Introduction

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“It is a fault in the execution, not of the architects” declared Jacques Delors, former President of the European Commission (1985 to 1995), to explain the current difficulties facing the Euro, the European Union’s single currency, and a product of the Maastricht Treaty.¹ Signed in the picturesque capital of the Dutch province of Limburg on 7 February 1992, the Treaty represented a radical, historical, and perhaps inevitable shift in the European project. Its provisions on economic and monetary integration, some of which are so hotly debated today, have had profound political, economic, social and diplomatic implications for the European Union.

By historical standards, more accustomed to counting in centuries rather than in decades, twenty years might appear to cover a short time span, but nevertheless allows sufficient distance for historians to take stock of the Maastricht Treaty. Accordingly, this special issue seeks to historicize events. It discusses the negotiations leading to the Treaty, teases out the bargaining processes between the main actors, weighs up the role of economic forces and ideational orientations and assesses some of its consequences in order to refine our understanding of the impact the Treaty has had on the integration process since 1992.

Moreover, this Treaty is a stark reminder that the past is always contingent upon the present. Ten, or even five years ago, assessment of the Treaty might have been radically different than it is today. The ongoing sovereign debt crisis, in which an ever larger and eminent group of experts warn of the growing possibility of the Euro’s collapse, has not only dramatically increased public awareness of this chapter of the EU’s very recent history, it also challenges some of our main focuses of interest and perhaps also our interpretation of events. During the 1990s, the second of the Treaty’s three pillars, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), attracted much attention, and sparked a debate about further cooperation in that field, particularly in the wake of the wars in the Balkans. Moreover, the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001 increased the attention paid to the third pillar of the Treaty – Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) – while the crisis of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 and the negotiations and torturous ratification of the Lisbon Treaty between 2007 and 2009 shifted attention again to the legal and constitutional aspects of the Maastricht Treaty. All such concerns are presently overshadowed by the dramatic events surrounding Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) as part of Maastricht’s first pillar and the sovereign debt crisis that has engulfed the Eurozone’s member states. These shifts in the public and to some extent also the academic debate reveal the complexity and multifaceted character of the Treaty. Moreover, they give

1. *The Telegraph*, 2 December 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financialcrisis/8932640/Jacques-Delors-interview-Euro-would-still-be-strong-if-it-had-been-built-to-my-plan.html>.

us a sense of humility in defining our own research agendas and in weighing up their importance.

There are several other reasons why researching such a recent period presents particular challenges for historians. Archives for the early 1980s are just now beginning to become accessible, and many of the sources historians, and in particular diplomatic historians would like to use for their research, are still closed or have limited access due to the thirty-year rule status. Yet, despite the restricted access to new sources, historians are now able to revisit existing empirical research by political scientists and others, and add their own interpretations to the ongoing debate about the road to Maastricht and its consequences.²

Besides the problem of temporal distance and the unavailability of sources, another factor complicating our research is the ongoing blame-game as to the possible reasons for the continuing crisis. The contributors to this special issue are not primarily interested in addressing the question as to whether the Euro, as a brainchild of the Maastricht Treaty, was a success or a failure when measured against political, economic, or any other criteria. Still, we cannot and should not fully avoid such questions either. Historically, crises have always played a key role in furthering and/or transforming European integration.³ Jean Monnet himself firmly believed that an integrated Europe would be forged through crises, and would be the outcome of the responses and solutions to such catalytic moments.⁴ The crisis in our times helps us to put some of the earlier ones into perspective, simply because the economic and political stakes are so much higher now, not only for the citizens of the EU, but also for the global economy. Also, it invites us to reassess the importance of other episodes of European integration that are linked to it.

While many of the factors mentioned so far complicate our agenda, others also help to make it easier. Perhaps most importantly, it would be wrong to think that we are walking on untrodden ground. The following articles, all penned by historians, were first presented and discussed in June 2012 at a workshop at Maastricht University. Not only could we make use of the existing interdisciplinary research on the subject, paying particular attention to the important contributions already made by political scientists. We also managed to invite some of them as well as several, fellow historians to our workshop to act as discussants. We strongly believe that research on the Maastricht Treaty has much to gain from such an interdisciplinary dialogue. Political scientists have not only done empirical research but they have also developed concepts such as epistemic communities, which are useful for historians to better grasp, both conceptually and empirically, and describe the processes leading to the origins, development, and long-term consequences of the Treaty.

2. See in particular the seminal work by K. DYSON, K. FEATHERSTONE, *The road to Maastricht: negotiating economic and monetary union*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999.
3. See R. KIRT (ed.), *Die europäische Union und ihre Krisen*, Nomos, Baden-Baden, 2001; L. KÜHNHARDT (ed.), *Crises in European Integration: Challenges and Responses, 1945-2005*, Berghahn Books, New York/Oxford, 2009.
4. J. MONNET, *Mémoires*, Fayard, Paris, 1976, p.488.

This special issue highlights two particular dimensions in the history of the Maastricht Treaty. On the one hand, it analyzes the political bargaining processes between the member states and the European institutions by assessing the origins, dimensions, and consequences of the “Treaty on European Union”, as it is officially called. Partly for pragmatic reasons, partly because of their specific significance, Germany, France, and Italy are particularly covered in this part of the analysis. On the other hand, several contributions scrutinize the Treaty’s first pillar, paying particular attention to EMU. While including other policy fields for which the Treaty was important, such as CFSP and JHA, would have been a valuable addition, this was not possible in the limited format of a special issue. The same holds true for a more systematic involvement of other actors, such as lobby groups, the media, or non-EU states including a crumbling superpower in the East and a triumphant superpower in the West. As such, this collection of articles does not claim to offer an exhaustive study of the Maastricht Treaty. Our focus on EMU simply reflects a certain concentration on this policy domain in recent historical research. Moreover, this thematic focus is timely and topical, as the most pressing issues at the moment are those related to monetary and economic integration with an eye on the origins and development of EMU and the decisions to allow certain countries to enter into the process during the 1990s. This, however, does not mean that the contributions fully ignore the strong links in the negotiations with other policy fields, which more often than not resulted in package deals between, for instance, Political Union and EMU.

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The first contribution, by N. Piers Ludlow, assesses some of the origins of the Maastricht Treaty by focusing on the legacy of the 1980s, and especially the obsession with treaty reform for which the Single European Act (SEA) of 1986 served as an important milestone. While acknowledging the geo-political earthquake that took place between 1989 and 1991, Ludlow argues that certain trends were in progress within the integration process in the decade before Maastricht that help to explain the gradual shift towards more ‘Europe’ and further integration by the late 1980s.

Antonio Varsori then provides an in-depth analysis of Italy’s role in the Maastricht Treaty negotiations. His contribution, based on an analysis of the Giulio Andreotti Archive, explores the challenges faced by Italian politicians from the mid-1980s and early 1990s as they struggled to contain rising inflation, reduce public spending, curb the power of organized crime and maintain political and economic credibility within the European Community on the eve of negotiations on the Treaty. Weaving between the domestic and the European narratives, Varsori presents a rich account of the influence that Italy exerted over France and Germany on EMU membership criteria.

In a similar vein to Varsori, Georges Saunier mainly concentrates on the political bargaining processes between member states, and in his contribution, he shifts attention to the preparation and bargaining position of the Treaty by the French

government. Saunier assesses this government's ability to shape the negotiation outcome at Maastricht according to its own preferences. He demonstrates that France often played an instrumental broker role during the treaty negotiations and was fairly successful in securing key objectives in each of the three pillars (EMU, JHA and CFSP), although it had to water down its original ambitions in several other chapters (e.g. social, industry) of the Treaty.

Wilfried Loth's contribution forms the hinge between the first set of articles, with their focus on member states and their roles, and the second set of papers highlighting monetary policy. More specifically, Loth explores Franco-German negotiations on Political and Monetary Union in the run-up to and during the intergovernmental conferences on these two issues. He argues that the compromises that were struck bilaterally help to explain the form and the shortcomings of the eventual agreement at Maastricht. The French and German leaders were influential in ensuring that German unification did not derail or delay the negotiations and their cooperation was crucial to their successful outcome; yet, bilateral concessions, notably on institutional and economic governance issues, also limited the ambitions of the Treaty in these two key areas.

Guido Thiemeyer then adds to this picture by highlighting the different arguments for and against monetary union in France and Germany. Thiemeyer embeds his analysis of the Maastricht Treaty negotiations in a wider discussion of the divergent economic philosophies in the two member states, and he contends that these ideational orientations had a huge impact on the negotiations, and complicated French-German relations over monetary issues in various ways.

Harold James follows this economic thread further in his analysis of central banks in the Maastricht context. He claims that the 1990s saw the emergence of a new philosophy of central banking, with the independence of central banks from political processes as a core component of a culture of monetary stability. Commission President Jacques Delors' decision to grant a key role to central bankers in designing the new monetary policy in the run-up to Maastricht proved pivotal in this context. Beyond its significance for the Treaty and the trajectory of European integration, James argues that this new philosophy, with its roots in a French school of thinking, soon turned into an international movement that also impacted on non-European countries, thus giving it a relevance far beyond the history of European integration alone.

Desmond Dinan's article concludes the collection by returning from the focus on monetary policy to the more general level of political negotiations. More precisely, Dinan takes stock of the integration process in the post-Maastricht environment. He assesses the impact that the Treaty has had on the EU's evolution over the past two decades by first exploring attempts at (unsatisfactory) treaty reform after 1993, with the Treaties of Amsterdam and Nice, and then by shifting attention to what he calls the 'constitutional turn' during the mid-2000s. Dinan's paper asks whether a pre-occupation with highly divisive institutional issues had undermined the credibility and utility of large-scale treaty reform in the post-Maastricht period and he contends

that as a much simpler time in the history of European integration, much now separates us from the Maastricht Treaty days.

Taken together, this collection of essays brings together analyses of the prehistory, the architecture, and the execution of the Maastricht Treaty. It demonstrates some of the in-built problems of the Treaty that have led to a fundamental crisis some 20 years later, as well as some of the reasons for these deficits. The articles also reveal the many achievements of the Treaty and how longer trends coalesced with *kairos*, with the unique moment and the context of the early 1990s at the end of the Cold War that had given birth to European integration some four decades earlier. Much more research is needed to deepen our findings and to widen them beyond the specific fields and set of actors analyzed here. Maastricht will stay with us, for better or for worse.

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