Introduction

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What better time than now could one find to explore the thorny plethora of scenarios that are cluttering political addresses in Brussels and elsewhere, media analyses and scientific debates, on the future of European integration? Whilst benefitting from the support of past endeavours to forecast various angles of the European project, the prominent researchers who have contributed to this issue of the Journal strive to present the possible outcomes of the more (and less) widespread ideas that have gained coherence and support with regard to the next steps to take, ever closer or quite to the contrary, on the EU path. Set against the background of the likely outcome of Brexit negotiations, but taking a much broader approach to the international context shaping such scenarios, and with an eye kept on the White House, the analyses presented in this issue are finely tuned due to the experience of their flagbearers, as I will strive to sum up below.

Michael Gehler poses no less a question than whether the EU integration project is endowed with imperial ambitions, thus being bound to go through all the steps that define the lifecycle of an empire. The complexity of this question is matched by the variety of angles from which the author regards the matter, comprising the historical inheritance, the matter of political union as an ultimate goal, the geostrategic stance gained after Eastern enlargement and, not least, the factors that hold the Union together. Solutions are put forward at the end, much like in the case of Wilfried Loth's study, tackling the matter of the EU's future from the standpoint of the surprising effects of some of the apparently damaging events that have struck the Union lately. In actuality, the author makes a point that should not be taken lightly – that Brexit and Trump are two factors that have enabled EU citizens to better comprehend the idea that their shared values are being threatened, which can ultimately lead to a strengthening of EU society.

On the other hand, Werner Müller-Pelzer engages in an exploration of the extent to which the identification of the EU with a community of values is damaging to an already crisis-ridden project. His view relies on a separation in this regard between Europe and the European Union, which should not result in the creation of a so-called European ideology, but, quite to the contrary, in the Europeans' familiarisation with "implanting European situations".

A welcome British touch to this debate is brought by Michael O'Neill, who dwells upon the major alterations of the Western Liberal Order in the current context, which threaten its very existence and whose origins are thoroughly explored. Complex matters ranging from insurgent politics, to the Brexit vote, economic and ideological views on globalisation and Donald Trump's politics are all assessed in a study that brings to the forefront of our debate the possibility that we are witnessing a genuine end of "the West".

The implications of the scenarios proposed by Jean-Claude Juncker for the future of EU integration are the subject of Georgiana Ciceo's article, who notably connects the debates on the nature of the principle of subsidiarity to the most plausible outcomes extracted from the forecasts of the President of the Commission. How has the principle marked the course of institutional reform along the decades, what transformations has it been subjected to in the unique framework of governance of the EU and how could it be used to accompany solutions to the future functionality of the project in the following years? Here are some of the questions this article provides answers to, amid our leitmotif germane to the shape of the EU to come.

The richness of any issue of our Journal also stems from the variety of subjects it encompasses. Here is why two contributions to the "free" section have been included, each with undoubted scientific weight in their respective areas, namely the EC/EU's trade regime in the 1980s-1990s, and the attempt of the EC to create a European Market Cup in Football in the late 1960s. To elaborate, in her article, Lucia Coppolaro relies on an impressive collection of primary sources to assess the EU's role in the globalisation of GATT and to make a pertinent case for the Union's contribution to the general liberalisation of trade. Furthermore, in his study entitled "Making Europe More Popular Thanks to Sports". The EEC, the UEFA the Project of a European Market Cup in Football, 1966-1968, Philippe Vonnard sheds light on a previously unexplored topic revealing the EC's interest in sports competitions, which is indicative of its early ambitions – albeit largely still unfulfilled – in this area. Numerous documents and interviews provide the solid scientific backing of this highly original piece of research.

To conclude, an issue of the JEIH which largely relies on scenario-building on the future of the EU has proved to be an ambitious endeavour, veiled in the inevitable work-in-progress atmosphere and with a multi-angle approach that enables one to explore the variety of viewpoints proposed in literature and political addresses. Ranging from the historical to the ideological, and from the political to the technical, the analyses are shaped by the internal crises and international hurdles (and opportunities) that rattle the European project and that are not likely to bring it to an unwanted end.

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