constantly changes form, it is on the path to an end-state whose features are unknown, everyone has different opinions about when the end-state will be reached, and it is unlikely that we will even know we have reached it until many years after the event.

Whatever it is, the EU is an entity with which we are all becoming more familiar. This is especially true in Europe, because the laws and decisions that govern the lives of Europeans are being made less at the local or national level, and increasingly as a result of negotiations and compromises among the EU member states. Developments at the EU level are becoming as important for Europeans to understand as those in their national capitals. Not long ago an 'informed citizen' was someone who knew how their national system of government worked, how their national economy functioned and how their national society was structured. To be 'informed' now demands a broader horizon, and familiarity with a new set of institutions, processes, and political, economic, and social forces.

Opinions on the value of regional integration – and its long-term prospects – will remain divided as long as they are confused and obscured by questions and doubts about the conditions that encourage integration, the logic of the steps taken towards integration, and the end product. Comparing the European Union with a conventional state can give us more insight, but we are still some way from agreement on what drives the process, and from understanding what we have created. Most confusingly, the goals of regional integration are only vaguely defined. The next three chapters will attempt to address some of the confusion by looking at the personality, evolution, and structure of the European Union.

Chapter 2

The Idea of Europe

We live in a European world. It is a multicultural world, to be sure, but most of it has been colonized at some point by one European power or another, and the majority of people today live in societies that are either based on the European political and cultural tradition or influenced on a daily basis by the norms and values of that tradition. The 'world culture' described by the American political scientist Lucien Pye (1966) is ultimately European in origin, even if it is most actively promoted and exported by the United States (which is itself primarily a product of European culture). For 'western', we could as easily think 'European'.

It is all the more ironic, then, that the idea of Europe is so hard to pin down. Its political and cultural identity is hard to define (beyond being an accumulation of national identities), its geographical boundaries remain uncertain, and there is little agreement on what 'Europe' represents. Europeans have had much to unite them over the centuries, but they have had much more to divide them. Their common historical experiences have been rare, they speak many different languages, they have struggled with religious and social divisions, their views of their place in the world have changed, they have gone to war with each other with alarming frequency, and they have often redrawn their common frontiers in response to changes in political affiliations.

But all is changing. In the immediate postwar years, Europeans were diverted by the need to rebuild their economies, their political systems, and their faith in one another, and were conscious of their perilous situation astride the divisions of the cold war. But with the rise of the European Community and then of the European Union, and the end of the cold war, Europeans have discovered their common interests, goals and values, and have had to accept the new responsibilities that have come with renewed global power and influence. Outsiders have also had to review their perception of Europe, which is now less a collection of sovereign states and more a global superpower. North American and Asian business and government leaders see the EU as a new source of competition for economic power and political influence, while most Eastern Europeans and Russians see it as an assertive new force for democratic and free market change.

The idea of European unity that has taken root and expanded since 1945 is nothing new. In fact it is an old idea that has simply been revived and, more importantly, adopted voluntarily by a large number of Europeans for the

first time. Monarchs, Popes, generals, and philosophers have dreamed about European unity since the Early Middle Ages, and have written and spoken about unity as a means of defending Europe against itself and outsiders since at least the fourteenth century. But for them it was no more than an ideal; for modern Europeans it has much greater immediacy, the effects of integration are impossible to ignore, and the implications for the idea of Europe have been profound. As a result, it has become more important to understand the meaning of Europe. What are its political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions, and how can these help us better understand the significance and impact of European integration? Has integration simply been an intergovernmental project pursued by elites and bureaucrats, or does it build upon – and help strengthen – a distinctively European political, economic and social model, and a distinctively European way of interpreting domestic and international problems, and of addressing those problems?

The changing identity of Europe

Defining 'Europe' and 'European' has never been simple, thanks to disagreements about the outer limits of the region and the inner character of its inhabitants. The rise of the EU has added a new dimension to the challenge, obliging us to think of inhabitants of the region not just as Spaniards or Belgians or Poles or Latvians, but also as 'Europeans'. And to add yet more spice to the debate, macro-integration has been accompanied by a micro-level loosening of ties as national minorities in several countries – such as the Scots in Britain, the Catalans in Spain, the Flemings and Walloons in Belgium, and multiple nationalities in the Balkans – express themselves more vocally, and remind us that European identity is being reformed not only from above but also from below.

Europe has never been united, and its long history has been one of repeated fragmentation, conflict, and the reordering of political boundaries. Parts of Europe have been brought together at different times for different reasons – beginning with the Romans and moving through the Franks to the Habsburgs, Napoleon, and Hitler – but while many have dreamed of unification, it has only been since the Second World War that the idea of setting aside insular nationalism in the interests of regional cooperation has won wide public and political support. For the first time in its history, almost the entire region has been engaged in a joint integrative exercise that has encouraged its inhabitants to think and behave as Europeans rather than as members of smaller cultural or national groups that just happen to inhabit the same landmass. But there is one key quality that crops up repeatedly throughout European history: Europeans have often been better at defining themselves in relation to outsiders than in relation to each other. External threats and opportunities have helped

give tighter definition to the European Union, just as they helped give tighter definition to earlier understandings of the meaning of Europe.

The word 'Europe' is thought to come from Greek mythology: Europa was a Phoenician princess who was seduced by Zeus disguised as a white bull, and was taken from her homeland in what is now Lebanon to Crete, where she later married the King of Crete. It is unclear when the term 'European' was first applied to a specific territory or its inhabitants, but it may have been when Greeks began to settle on the Ionian Islands and came across the Persians. The expansion of the Persian Empire led to war in the fifth century BC, when Greek authors such as Aristotle began to make a distinction between the languages, customs and values of Greeks, the inhabitants of Asia (as represented by the Persians) and the 'barbarians' of Europe, an area vaguely defined as being to the north. Maps drawn up by classical scholars subsequently showed the world divided into Asia, Europe and Africa, with the boundary between Europe and Asia marked by the River Don and the Sea of Azov (Delanty, 1995, pp. 18–19; den Boer, 1995).

The Roman Empire – whose power peaked from approximately 200 BC to 400 AD – brought much of Europe under what has been described as a 'single cultural complex' (Cornell and Matthews, 1982) for the first time. The Roman hegemony also came with a common language (Latin), a common legal and administrative system, and – following the adoption of Christianity in AD 391 – a common religion. However, the Roman Empire was centred on the Mediterranean and included North Africa and parts of the Middle East as well, and so was not exclusively European. Because the Romans presided over an empire, there was no prevailing sense that everyone living under Roman rule was part of a region with a common identity. Furthermore, the inhabitants of Europe were known as Franks or Romans by inhabitants of the Middle East and North Africa. The situation was further confused with the end of Roman hegemony in the last part of the fourth century AD, when Rome was invaded by the northern 'barbarians' and Europe broke up into feuding kingdoms. The invasions separated Europe culturally from its classical past, and the Dark Ages that followed witnessed redefining movements of people as different tribes – notably the Huns, the Vikings, and the Magyars – invaded other parts of Europe.

The birth of Europe is often dated to the Early Middle Ages (500–1050), which saw the emergence of a common civilization with Christianity as its religion, Rome as its spiritual capital, and Latin as the language of education. The new sense of a European identity was strengthened by the development of a rift between the western and eastern branches of Christianity, the expansion of Frankish power from the area of what are now Belgium and the Netherlands, and the development of a stronger territorial identity in the face of external threats, notably from the Middle East. The retreat of Europeans in the face of Asian expansionism reached its peak in the seventh and eighth centuries with

the advance of Arab forces across North Africa and into Spain and southern France. They were turned back only in 732 with their epic defeat by Charles Martel at Poitiers, in west central France.

The term 'European' was used by contemporary chroniclers to describe the forces under the command of Martel (Hay, 1957, p. 25), but it would not become more widely used until after 800, when his grandson Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the Pope and hailed in poems as the king and father of Europe. His Frankish Empire covered most of what are now France, Switzerland, Austria, southern Germany and the Benelux countries. (As champions of European unity in the 1950s liked to point out, this area coincided closely with the territory of the six founding member states of the European Economic Community.) Although the Frankish Empire helped promote the spread of Christianity, it was quickly divided among Charlemagne's sons after his death in 814, and while the Holy Roman Empire persisted until the middle of the fourteenth century, it was to be famously dismissed by the French writer Voltaire as 'neither Holy, nor Roman, nor an Empire'.

Medieval Europe was technologically backward in comparison with China, and peripheral to the development of civilization. Central authority declined and intra-European trade ended in the wake of further invasions from Scandinavia and central Europe, and feudalism strengthened as large landowners exercised new authority over their subjects. By the beginning of the High Middle Ages in the mid-eleventh century, however, commerce had revived, agricultural production and population were growing, towns were becoming centres of intellectual and commercial life, a new class of merchants was emerging, monarchs and the aristocracy were imposing greater control over their territories, and the threat of invasion from outside Europe had largely disappeared. Indeed Europe now became the aggressor. As Christian armies gathered from all over the region to take part in the Crusades (1095–1291), aimed at recapturing Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Muslims, the concept of Europe developed a tighter identity.

Safe from invasion, European culture took root and by the fifteenth century it had become more usual for scholars to use the term 'Europe', which to outsiders was synonymous with 'Christendom'. This was ironic given the turbulence that followed in the wake of famines, the Black Death and the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453), which saw the emerging power of monarchs, and challenges to the authority of the papacy that led to the Reformation and the growth of the modern state system. Religious divisions strengthened as a multitude of Protestant churches expressed their independence from the Roman Catholic Church, and for much of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century Europe was destabilized by religious warfare. But this did not stop Europeans from embarking on voyages of discovery to Africa, the Americas, and Asia, there was an expansion of education based on the classical works

of Greek and Latin authors, and a revolution in science was sparked by the findings of Copernicus, Sir Isaac Newton, and others. These developments combined to give Europeans a new confidence and a new sense of their place in the world.

Delanty (1995, p. 42) argues that cultural diversity within Europe ensured that the idea of European unity was restricted to matters relating to foreign conquest. The earliest proponents of unity were moved in part by their belief that a united Christian Europe was essential for the revival of the Holy Roman Empire and by concern about Europe's insecurity in the face of gains by the Turks in Asia Minor; most of the proposals for unity were based on the argument that the supremacy of the papacy should be revived (Heater, 1992, p. 6). One example was the suggestion made in 1306 by the French advocate Pierre Dubois (1255–1312). Noting that war was endemic in Europe despite the teachings of Christianity, Dubois suggested that the princes and cities of Europe should form a confederal 'Christian Republic', overseen by a permanent assembly of princes working to ensure peace through the application of Christian principles. In the event of a dispute, a panel of nine judges could be brought together to arbitrate, with the Pope acting as a final court of appeal (Heater, 1992, p. 10; Urwin, 1995, p. 2).

The Renaissance (roughly 1350–1550) saw loyalty shift away from the Church, with growing support for individualism and republicanism, and the early development of the state system, beginning in England and France. Under the circumstances, the idea of regional unity was far from the minds of all but a small minority of idealists. Among these were King George of Bohemia and his diplomatist Antoine Marini, who proposed a European confederation to respond to the threat posed by the Turks in the mid-fifteenth century. Their plan – which was remarkably similar to the structure eventually set up for the European Union – involved an assembly meeting regularly and moving its seat every five years, a college of permanent members using a system of majoritarian decision making, a council of kings and princes, and a court to adjudicate disputes (de Rougemont, 1966, p. 71).

The Church had become so divided by the end of the sixteenth century that the idea of a united Christian Europe was abandoned, and those who still championed the idea of European unity saw it as based less on a common religion than on addressing the religious causes of conflict and the growing threat of Habsburg power. These were the motives behind the Grand Design outlined by the Duc de Sully (1560–1641) in France in the early seventeenth century. He proposed a redrawing of administrative lines throughout Europe so as to achieve equilibrium of power, and the creation of a European Senate with 66 members serving three-year terms (Heater, 1992, pp. 30–5). But by now the borders of European states were achieving new clarity and permanence, weakening the notion of a wider European identity. When the Peace of Westphalia came in 1648, with two treaties bringing an end to the Thirty

Years' War and the Eight Years' War and leaving many territorial adjustments in its wake, a new permanence was given to the idea of state sovereignty.

But dreamers dreamt on, and one of those influenced by de Sully's ideas was William Penn (1644–1718), who in the middle of yet another war between England and France (the War of the Grand Alliance) published *An Essay Towards the Present Peace of Europe* (1693). In it he proposed the creation of a European diet or parliament that could be used for dispute resolution, and suggested that quarrels might be settled by a three-quarters majority vote, something like the qualified majority voting system used today in the EU Council of Ministers (see Chapter 4). This would be weighted according to the economic power of the participating states: Germany would have 12 votes, France ten, England six, and so on (Heater, 1992, pp. 53–6; Salmon and Nicoll, 1997, pp. 3–6). In 1717 the Abbé de Saint-Pierre (1658–1743) published his three-volume *Project for Settling an Everlasting Peace in Europe*, in which he argued for free trade and a European Senate. His ideas were to inspire the German poet Friedrich von Schiller to write his 'Ode to Joy' in 1785. Sung to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, it has become the European anthem: 'Thy magic reunites those whom stem custom has parted, All men will become brothers under thy gentle wing'.

Several prominent thinkers and philosophers subsequently explored the theme of peace through unity. Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote in favour of a European federation; Jeremy Bentham, in *A Plan for an Universal and Perpetual Peace* (1789), wrote of his ideas for a European assembly and a common army; Immanual Kant's *Thoughts on Perpetual Peace* (1795) included suggestions for the achievement of world peace; and the Comte de Saint-Simon, in response to the Napoleonic Wars, published a pamphlet in 1814 titled *The Reorganization of the European Community*, in which he argued in support of a federal Europe with common institutions, but within which national independence would be maintained and respected.

The desire to overcome Europe's divisions led some political leaders to the conclusion that conquest was the best response, but they found themselves foiled by the sheer size of the task and by the resistance from key actors to changes in the balance of power. The attempts by Charlemagne, Philip II of Spain and the Habsburgs to establish a European hegemony all failed, argues Urwin (1995, p. 2), because of the 'complex fragmented mosaic of the continent ... [and] the inadequate technical resources of the would-be conquerors to establish and maintain effective control by force over large areas of territory against the wishes of the local populations'. The first attempt to achieve unity by force in modern times was made by Napoleon, who brought what are now France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and parts of Germany and Italy under his direct rule. He saw himself as the 'intermediary' between the old order and the new, and hoped for a European association

with a common body of law, a common court of appeal, a single currency, and a uniform system of weights and measures.

Despite rapid economic, social and technological change, nineteenth-century Europe was driven by nationalism, founded in the effects of the 1815 Congress of Vienna on the encouragement of great-power rivalry, and tracing its development through to the unification of Italy in the 1860s and of Germany in 1871, and beyond. It also prompted rivalry among European states, both within Europe and further afield in the competition to build colonial empires. Dreams of a United States of Europe nonetheless continued to inspire nineteenth-century intellectuals such as the French poet and novelist Victor Hugo, who in 1848 declared that the nations of Europe, 'without losing [their] distinctive qualities or ... glorious individuality, will merge closely into a higher unity and will form the fraternity of Europe ... Two huge groups will be seen, the United States of America and the United States of Europe, holding out their hands to one another across the ocean.' But nationalism won out, feeding into militarization and the outbreak in 1914 of the Great War, when all the competing tensions within Europe finally boiled over in what was, to all intents and purposes, a European civil war. One of the effects was chaos in much of central Europe, and the peace arranged under the 1919 Treaty of Versailles did little more than fan the fires of nationalism, particularly in Germany.

Before, during and after the war, philosophers and political leaders continued to ponder the challenge of encouraging Europeans to rise above national identity and consider themselves part of a broader sub-continental culture, thereby helping remove the causes of conflict, and allowing Europe to better defend itself against external threats. Where Dubois, Penn, Saint-Simon, and others had been writing in a vacuum of public interest, the horrors of the Great War now created an audience that was more receptive to the idea of European cooperation, and the new debates involved not just intellectuals but politicians as well. The strongest support came from the leaders of smaller states that were tired of being caught up in big-power rivalry, and several made practical moves towards economic cooperation. Thus Belgium and Luxembourg created a limited economic union in 1922, including fixing the exchange rates of their currencies relative to each other, and in 1930 joined several Scandinavian states in an agreement to limit tariffs.

One of the most convinced champions of European unity was Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, who in the early 1920s proposed a Pan-European Union that might reverse the internal decline of Europe (Box 2.1). He failed to generate a mass following, but his ideas caught the attention of leading figures in the arts, such as the German composer Richard Strauss and the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, as well as several contemporary or future political leaders, including Georges Pompidou, Thomas Masaryk, Konrad Adenauer, Winston Churchill, and two French prime ministers, Edouard Herriot and Aristide Briand.

Box 2.1 Paneuropa

The years of peace after the First World War saw the publication of a flood of books and articles exploring variations on the theme of European unity. The most influential of these were written by Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi (1894–1972), the son of an Austrian diplomat and his Japanese wife, and co-founder in 1922 with the Archduke Otto von Habsburg of the Pan-European Union.

The problems facing Europe after the war convinced Coudenhove-Kalergi that the only workable guarantee of peace was political union, and he outlined his ideas in a manifesto titled *Paneuropa*, published in 1923. He argued that while Europe's global supremacy was over, the internal decline of Europe could be avoided if its political system was modernized, with a new emphasis on large-scale cooperation. Changes in Europe could not happen in isolation from those in the rest of the world, however, and Coudenhove-Kalergi felt that the best hope for world peace lay in the creation of five 'global power fields':

- the Americas (excluding Canada)
- the Soviet Union (USSR)
- Eastern Asia (China and Japan)
- Paneuropa (including continental Europe's colonies in Africa and southeast Asia)
- Britain and its empire (including Canada, Australia, southern Africa, the Middle East and India).

He excluded the USSR from Europe because it was too diverse and did not have the democratic traditions necessary for the development of Paneuropa. He was uncomfortable about excluding Britain, but did so because he felt it was so powerful as to be a political continent in its own right. It could serve as a mediator with the United States, however, and could become part of Paneuropa if it lost its empire.

Coudenhove-Kalergi argued that an arms race among European states would be destructive and keep Europe in a permanent state of crisis. Instead, he proposed a four-stage process for the achievement of European union: a conference of representatives from the 26 European states, the agreement of treaties for the settlement of European disputes, the development of a customs union, and the drafting of a federal European constitution. He also presciently suggested that English should become the common second language for Europe, since it was becoming the dominant global language.

The prevailing view in France was that European cooperation was an impossible dream, and that the best hope for peace lay in French strength and German weakness (Bugge, 1995, p. 102). Herriot disagreed, and in 1924 he called for the creation of a United States of Europe, to grow out of the postwar cooperation promoted by the League of Nations. For his part, Briand called for a European confederation working within the League of Nations, and in May 1930 distributed a memorandum to governments outlining his

ideas (Salmon and Nicoll, 1997, pp. 9–14). In it he wrote of the need for 'a permanent regime of solidarity based on international agreements for the rational organization of Europe'. He used such terms as 'common market' and 'European Union', and even listed specific policy needs, such as the development of trans-European transport networks, and anticipated what would later become the regional and social policies of the EU. He is often described in France as one of the founding fathers of European integration, but the impact of his memorandum was undermined by the gathering tensions sparked by the rise of Nazism.

Adolf Hitler was obsessed with correcting the 'wrongs' of Versailles and creating a German 'living space'. He spoke of a 'European house', but only in terms of the importance of German rule over the continent in the face of the perceived threat from communists and 'inferior elements' within and outside Europe. The nationalist tensions that had not been resolved by the Great War now boiled over once again into pan-European conflict. Hitler was able to expand his Reich to include Austria, Bohemia, Alsace-Lorraine, and most of Poland, and to occupy much of the rest of continental Europe.

With the end of the Second World War in 1945, the pre-existing economic and social divisions of Europe were joined by the ideological rift between a capitalist west and a socialist east. The circumstances would have seemed unfavourable to supporters of unity and regional integration, and yet it was to be the very depth of the threats posed to Europe by the cold war that was to allow the dreamers to begin taking the substantive actions needed to move beyond theory and philosophy into the realms of practical political, economic and social change. Europe was threatened less by itself (as it had been during the centuries of great-power rivalry) than by external tensions growing out of superpower rivalry. At no time in its history had it been so divided, or had its future been so patently out of its control. The dismay at the depths to which it had been reduced by centuries of conflict now combined with discomfort at the opposing directions in which Europe was being pulled by the United States and the Soviet Union to lead to a new focus on European cooperation and independence. By the time the cold war came to an end in 1990–91, the ideological and social divisions that had been represented by the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain were well on their way to extinction. Encouraged by the removal of the economic and political barriers that had for so long kept them apart, Europeans were setting aside their differences and focusing new attention on their common political, social and cultural values.

Europeans still make many distinctions among themselves. Eastern Europe still struggles to rid itself of the heritage of state socialism and central planning, Germans still distinguish between those from the east and those from the west, Italy is culturally and economically divided into north and south, and Britain is an amalgam of English, Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish influences. Cultural and economic differences also continue to complicate European

identity: the Mediterranean states to the south are distinctive from the maritime states to the west or the Scandinavian states to the north. And the rivalries, suspicions and stereotypes that have their roots in centuries of conflict still surface periodically. But compared with just a generation ago, what separates Europeans has become less distinct and important than what unites them. A host of critical changes – including the increased mobility of Europeans, a communications revolution that has made Europe a smaller place, the growth in intra-European trade, the rise of pan-European corporations, and a new sensitivity to the differences that exist between Europe, the United States and Russia, and of course the rise of the European Union – have combined to strengthen the sense that there is less to distinguish Europeans from one another today than they once thought.

Where is Europe?

In spite of all the political, economic, and social changes that have taken place in Europe since 1945, many doubts remain about the wisdom and the future of European integration. Most of those doubts have their roots in four main problems. First, few of the EU's member states are culturally homogeneous, and there is no such thing as a European race. The constant reordering of territorial lines over the centuries has bequeathed to almost every European state a multinational society, and has left several national groups – such as the Germans, the Poles, the Basques and the Irish – divided by national frontiers. Many states have also seen large influxes of immigrants since the 1950s, including Algerians to France, Turks to Germany and Indians to Britain. Not only is there no dominant culture, but most Europeans rightly shudder at the thought of their separate identities being subordinated to some kind of homogenized Euroculture. At least part of the resistance to integration is generated by concerns about threats to national cultural identity. Europeans might be striving to create unity out of diversity, but the cry of '*Vive la difference*!' is not forgotten.

Second, the linguistic divisions of Europe are substantial: its natives speak more than 40 languages, which are often vigorously defended as symbols of national identity; by contrast, one of the factors that helped the development of the United States was the existence of a common language. Multilingualism in Europe also means that all official EU documents are translated into the 23 official languages of the member states,[1] although the work of EU institutions is increasingly carried out in English and French. Supported by its rapid spread as the language of global commerce and diplomacy, the dominance of English

1. Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish Gaelic, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish.

grows, and it is slowly becoming the language of Europe. This worries the French in particular and other Europeans to some extent, but it is probably irresistible and will at least give Europeans a way of talking to each other, and help reduce the cultural differences that divide them.

Third, the histories of European states overlapped for centuries as they colonized, went to war, or formed alliances with each other. But those overlaps often emphasized their differences rather than giving them the sense of a shared past, and European integration grew in part out of the reactive idea of ending the conflicts that arose from those differences. Historical divisions were further emphasized by the external colonial interests of European powers, which encouraged them to develop competing sets of external priorities at the expense of cultivating closer ties with their immediate neighbours. Even now, Britain, France, Spain, and Portugal have close ties with their former colonies, while Germany – for different reasons – has interests in Eastern Europe. Many Europeans still need to be convinced that internal links are as important as external links.

Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, the political and geographical boundaries of Europe have never been settled. It is often described as a 'continent', but continents are defined by geographers as large, unbroken, and discrete landmasses that are almost entirely surrounded by water. Strictly speaking, Europe is no more than part of the Asian continent, but no-one would seriously describe Europeans as Asians, even if there is no agreement on where Europe ends and Asia begins. The western, northern, and southern boundaries of Europe offer no difficulties, because they are conveniently demarcated by the Atlantic, the Arctic, and the Mediterranean. Unfortunately, there is no handy geographical feature to mark Europe's eastern boundary. It is usually defined as running down the Ural Mountains, across the Caspian Sea, along the southern edge of the Caucasus Mountains, across the Black Sea and through the Bosporus Strait. But these are no more than convenient physical features that have been adopted despite political realities.

Consider the problem of the Urals, which were nominated as a boundary by an eighteenth-century Russian cartographer, Vasily Tatishchev, so that Russia could claim to be an Asian as well as a European power. If we accept them as a boundary, then six former Soviet republics – Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and the three Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) – are part of Europe. The Baltic states offer few problems, because they have historically been bound to Europe, and are now members of the European Union and NATO. But questions remain about the orientation of Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine, all three of which are still caught in a residual struggle for influence between Russia and Europe. Belarus is a political outlier, since it has resisted the wave of democracy that has swept over most of its neighbours. Ukraine underwent its famous Orange Revolution in 2004 that confirmed President Viktor Yushchenko in office, and he made clear his aspirations for Ukrainian

membership of the EU, but there are many political and economic hurdles to cross before that becomes a reality. In Moldova, meanwhile, political leaders have hinted at an interest in EU membership, but the country is poor and has strong historical and cultural links with Russia.

The major problem with the Urals is that they do not mark the political border between two states, but are deep in the heart of Russia. Russians have sometimes been defined – and have seen themselves – as European, and Russia west of the Urals was long known as Eurasia because of the distinctions imposed on the region by Europeans, but opinion on Russia's identity remains mixed: some Russians see it as part of Europe and the West, others distrust the West and see Russia as distinctive from both Europe and Asia, and yet others see it as a bridge between the two (Smith, 1999, p. 50). The most obvious problem with defining Russia as European is that three-quarters of its land area is east of the Urals, and many of the more than 40 ethnic minorities that live in Russia – such as the Siberian minorities of Buryatia, Evenki, Khakassia, and Selkup – are unquestionably non-European. Further south, meanwhile, the Caucasus Mountains present similar problems; should the republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia be considered European (they are all members of the Council of Europe, after all, and there have been hints here, too, as in Ukraine, of EU and NATO membership down the line) or are they too politically and economically tied to Russia?

In central Europe, changes in the balance of power long meant that the Poles, the Czechs, and the Slovaks were caught in the crossfire of great-power competition, which is why this region was known as the 'lands between'. The west looked on the area as a buffer against Russia, a perception that was helped by the failure of its people to form lasting states identified with dominant national groups. During the cold war the distinctiveness of Eastern Europe was further emphasized by the ideological divisions between east and west, despite the historical ties that meant Poland was actually closer to Western Europe than to Russia. But the end of the cold war meant a rapid reorientation of central Europe towards the west, and all states in the region are now members of the EU and NATO.

For their part, the Balkans occupy an ambiguous position between Europe and Asia, being a geographical part of the former but historically drawn towards the latter. They were long regarded as an extension of Asia Minor, and until relatively recently were still described by Europeans as the Near East (Hobsbawm, 1991, p. 17). Most Europeans have traditionally regarded them as a zone of transition between two 'civilizations', whether the term is applied to religions (the boundary between Islam, Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodoxy) or to political communities (the boundary between the eastern and western Roman Empires, between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, and more recently between Slavic-Russian, western, and eastern influences).

The Balkans have come under the authority of the Macedonians, the Romans, the eastern Roman empire, Slavic tribes, Christianity, the Kingdom of Hungary, the Venetians, and – from the sixteenth century until 1918 – the Ottoman Turks. Except during the Tito regime (1945–80), the region has never been united, and the allegiance of its inhabitants has always been divided. These changes created what Delanty (1995, pp. 51–2) describes as 'frontier societies in the intermediary lands' between great powers. The Slavs in particular were split between those who accepted Catholicism, Greek Orthodoxy, or Islam, which resulted in cultural heterogeneity in spite of the greater linguistic homogeneity that existed among Slavs than among the peoples of Western Europe (Delanty, 1995, p. 54). Slavs continue to have affiliations with Russia, which is part of the reason why NATO was wary about becoming too deeply involved in the conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s. Since the breakup of Yugoslavia there has been a trend for Balkan national groups to look to the EU; the Slovenians were the first to become members in 2004, Croatia and Macedonia have been accepted as candidate countries, and other Balkan republics have broached the prospect of eventual EU membership. (The Balkans also include part of Turkey, discussion about whose European identity creates its own set of problems – see Box 2.2.)

So where, then, is Europe? If its borders with Turkey, the Caucasus and Russia are taken as its eastern limits, then it consists today of 39 countries: the 27 members of the EU, three other Western European states (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland), and nine Eastern European states.[2] If a broader definition of Europe's boundaries is accepted, then it includes four more countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. Stretching the limits of credibility, some (such as former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi) have even suggested that Israel should be considered European, and might qualify for EU membership, but this view has little support.

Whatever Europe's external boundaries, its inner personality has been driven by two critical developments. First, the cold war division of Europe has faded into the mists of history as Western and Eastern Europeans have buried their political, economic and ideological differences, and as the bonds among them have tightened and strengthened. Political and economic investments have flowed from west to east, and workers in search of new opportunities have moved from east to west. Second, enlargement has helped reduce the differences between 'Europe' and the 'European Union'. As recently as 2004, less than half the states of Europe were members of the EU, which was home to only two-thirds of Europeans. Today, the EU covers three-quarters of the land area of Europe, includes two-thirds of the states of Europe, accounts for 93 per cent of the economic wealth of Europe, and is home to four out of every five Europeans. We may still quibble about the eastern borders of Europe,

2. Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, and Ukraine. The number will increase to ten if and when the independence of Kosovo is agreed.

Box 2.2 The Turkish question

When it comes to defining the borders of Europe, and deciding the limits of EU enlargement, no question is as troubling as that of Turkey. The European Community agreed as long ago as 1963 that Turkish membership was possible, and it became an associate member of the Community that same year. It applied for full membership in 1987, a customs union between the EU and Turkey came into force in December 1995, Turkey was formally recognized as an applicant country in 2002, and negotiations on EU membership opened in 2005. But a string of troubling questions has muddied the waters. Perhaps most fundamental has been the matter of whether or not Turkey is a European country. Most Europeans see it as part of Asia Minor and part of the Islamic sphere of influence, but the Bosporus is usually regarded as the border between Europe and Asia, which means that about 4 per cent of the land area of Turkey lies inside Europe. And the geographical argument has been undermined since Cyprus became an EU member in 2004; Nicosia is further from Brussels than Ankara.

But the real barriers to Turkish membership of the EU are less geographical than they are political, economic and religious. The EU has agreed three criteria for aspiring members, known as the Copenhagen conditions: an applicant must be democratic, capitalist, and willing to adopt the existing body of EU laws. Turkey is clearly capitalist, and has made great efforts to meet the third of these requirements, most notably abolishing the death penalty in 2004. But while it is clearly capitalist it is also poor, with a per capita GDP one-tenth that of the EU, and current EU members fear not only that billions of euros in subsidies and investments will be diverted to Turkey if it joins the EU, but that numerous Turks will move to richer parts of the EU in search of jobs. As to Turkish democracy, its record on human rights has been poor, with concerns – for example – about the role of the military in politics, about the treatment of the Kurdish minority, and about women's rights.

But the most telling – if usually unspoken – concern about prospective Turkish membership of the EU is religious. Turkey is a Muslim state, and even though its brand of Islam is secular and western-oriented, the potential difficulties of integrating 72 million Turkish Muslims into a club that often emphasizes its Christian credentials, and that has been struggling with accommodating its own existing Muslim minorities, are substantial. If Turkey was small, poor and Muslim it might be less of a problem, but its size means that it would become the second largest member state of the EU by population after Germany. The resulting doubts have divided European public and political opinion, which tends to focus on the challenges rather than the opportunities offered by Turkish membership. Among the latter: a large new market and labour pool, and the importance of Turkey in helping Europe strengthen its geopolitical relationship with the Middle East and the Muslim world. (For further discussion, see Morris, 2005.)

but the differences between the EU and Europe are rapidly disappearing, with the result that the location and the mission of Europe have never been clearer than they are today.

The Meaning of Europe

There is an old and well-worn joke that heaven is where the police are British, the cooks are French, the mechanics are German, the lovers are Italian and everything is organized by the Swiss. Meanwhile, hell is where the police are German, the cooks are British, the mechanics are French, the lovers are Swiss, and everything is organized by the Italians. National stereotypes such as these abound in Europe (as they do everywhere), some based on a modicum of truth, some with no redeeming qualities, and most nonetheless perpetuated by the media and popular culture. But even if such stereotypes are typically wrong (or wrong-headed), what they tell us is that Europe is a region of enormous diversity. Nationalism and national identity are alive and well, and every country claims to have a distinctive personality arising out of a combination of history, culture, norms, and values. A country may share many of its norms and values with other countries, and its population may be divided internally by multiple different social and political values, but each is branded with a personality that is usually assumed to be unique to each country.

Out of this melange of competing identities, how is it possible to pin down a distinctive European personality? Surely the histories, cultures and social structures of European states are too deeply ingrained to make such an exercise credible? And those who doubt the wisdom and effects of European integration are more than ready to point to the many instances where EU member states still squabble and disagree. The open disagreement over the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 is a prime example, often touted as evidence of the underlying weaknesses of the European experiment, notably in the area of foreign policy. But what almost all the analysts and observers failed to mention was that the disagreement was primarily between European governments, and not between Europeans themselves. Indeed, opinion polls found a near uniformity of opinion across Europe, with 70–90 per cent of those polled expressing opposition to the war, even in countries whose governments supported the war, including Britain, Spain, Italy, Denmark, and the Netherlands.

At the same time, a growing body of research indicates that there are many increasingly common values and opinions across the EU on a broad array of issues, ranging from welfarism to capital punishment, immigration, international relations, environmental protection, and the relationship between Church and state. Much remains to be done to better understand and clarify the commonalities, and to move the analysis beyond the increasingly tired obsession with what divides rather than unites Europe, but the outlines of Europeanism have achieved a new clarity in recent years, particularly since the end of the cold war finally allowed Europeans from east and west to begin expressing and exerting themselves without being limited by the constraints of rivalry between the Americans and the Soviets.

'Europeanism' is usually understood to mean support for the process of European integration. Hence Scruton (1996, p. 180) defines it as the 'attitude which sees the well-being, destiny and institutions of the major European states as so closely linked by geographical and historical circumstances that no cogent political action can be successfully pursued in one state without some reference to, and attempt to achieve integration with, the others'. But perhaps it is time to move beyond the narrow focus on integration, and to think instead of Europeanism as signifying the collective values and principles associated with Europe and Europeans. An initial attempt was made to pin them down in 2003, when – inspired by the massive demonstrations against the impending invasion of Iraq that were held in every major European city on 15 February – the German and French philosophers Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida hailed what they optimistically saw as the birth of a 'European public sphere', noted that there had been a reaction to nationalism that had helped give contemporary Europe 'its own face', and argued that a 'core Europe' (excluding Britain and Eastern Europe) should be built as a counterweight to US influence in the world. They listed several features of what they described as a common European 'political mentality', including secularization, support for the welfare state, a low threshold of tolerance for the use of force, and support for multilateralism (Habermas and Derrida, 2003 [2005]).

During the cold war, the outlines of a distinctive European identity were hard to find, divided as the sub-continent was by the lines of the conflict, and subject as most European states were to the political lead of the United States (in the west) or of the Soviet Union (in the east). European priorities were subsumed under the broader goals of cold war conflict, and neither group of states was in the position to offer much resistance to the lead of the superpowers. This did not stop the governments of western states from privately resisting US policy (for example, in Vietnam and the Middle East), or those of eastern states from occasionally resisting Soviet control. But it was only with the end of the cold war that Europe was once again in the position to be able to pursue more freely the policies and goals that best suited European needs and best reflected European values. The result has been a new awareness of what makes Europe different, the key elements of which can be found in four major areas: political values, economic values, social values, and attitudes towards international relations.

On the political front, the Europeans are clearly champions of democracy, but they also have a particularly European view of the nature and purposes of democracy. The structure and distribution of power is driven by the parliamentary system, which – while not peculiar to Europe – was born in Europe and today forms the basis of all national European political systems, albeit with local variations. One effect of the system is that political parties play a more central role in European politics than they do in much of the rest

of the world (in spite of the many suggestions that European party systems are on the decline), the distribution of seats in national legislatures determining the make-up of governments, and the variety and ideological spread of parties reflecting and driving the diversity of voter opinion. Although the rigidity of social class has declined with the growth of social mobility, and neither voting nor party identification are as class driven as they once were, in comparison to the United States there is a greater sense of class consciousness in Europe. If class identification is on the decline, national and ethnic political divisions have been on the rise thanks to a combination of resurgent local nationalism and of immigration first from former European colonies and more recently from neighbouring states. Finally, national politics in Europe is heavily influenced by the impact of integration, which has had an homogenizing effect on political culture and on the content of national laws and policies.

On the economic front, Europeans are committed capitalists and supporters of the free market, but they place a premium on the redistribution of wealth and opportunity, and on the responsibility of government to maintain a level playing field. As Prestowitz puts it, one of the most fundamental differences between the American and European economic models is that 'Americans emphasize equality of opportunity, [while] Europeans focus more on equality of results' (Prestowitz, 2003, pp. 236–7). Europeans have a higher level of tolerance than Americans for government intervention in the marketplace, and generally support the idea that key services should be managed and offered by the government, and paid for out of taxes. One American observer – Jeremy Rifkin – has gone so far as to talk of a new European dream that is threatening to eclipse the much-vaunted American dream. He contrasts the American emphasis on economic growth, personal wealth, and individual self-interest with the European emphasis on sustainable development, quality of life, and community, and concludes that the EU is developing a new social and political model better suited to the needs of the globalizing world of the new century (Rifkin, 2004). Europeans have not yet been able to address the problems of persistent poverty and widespread unemployment (just as no-one has), but their approaches stand in contrast to those of the United States, which places an emphasis on self-reliance and on the private delivery of key services.

There has been recent debate about just how much European governments agree on the economic responsibilities of the state, and an interest in the distinctions between the 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'continental' or Rhenish European economic models. The former – so called (see Albert, 1993) because it is associated with English-speaking countries such as Britain, Ireland, the US and Canada – features lower levels of tax and regulation, a greater reliance on the private sector to provide key services, and a greater level of market freedom. The latter takes the opposite view, arguing that the state must intervene more actively to redistribute wealth and address poverty. Those who support the Anglo-Saxon model like to point to its successes in achieving higher

levels of productivity and lower levels of unemployment and inflation. But they also fail to note that the Anglo-Saxon economies differ substantially in several respects, most obviously in contrasting attitudes towards the welfare state. Meanwhile, supporters of the continental model argue that it offers corporations and workers more protection, particularly from the pressures of globalization, and that it generates less economic inequality and creates less poverty. But they fail to note that poverty is still a widespread problem throughout Europe, and that the wealth of the European single market has grown on the back of globalization. The existence of two models also rather overlooks the homogenization of the structure of European economies that has taken place as a result of the single market, increased intra-European trade and investment, corporate mergers and acquisitions, and common policies on competition.

On the social front, there is not yet a distinctive European society, in spite of the long tradition of cultural superiority that Europeans felt over much of the rest of the world, particularly over those regions that were colonized at least in part out of a sense of a mission to civilize. Considerable barriers are created today by language differences, by the absence of pan-European media, and by cultural differences (see Box 2.3), and yet there are many trends which suggest substantial agreement among Europeans on a variety of issues. Thus there is strong support for the idea that government should provide basic services such as education and health care (existing alongside private alternatives), a view which sees its most essential occurrence in the welfare state. Hutton (2003, pp. 54–8) argues that while the American liberal definition of rights does not extend beyond the political to the economic and social, the European conception of rights is broader, encapsulating free health care, free education, the right to employment insurance, and so on.

At the same time, Europeans are resistant to suggestions that government should be active in making moral decisions or defining the social choices of individuals. This can be seen in the predominantly liberal positions on issues such as abortion, capital punishment, gun control, censorship, doctor-assisted suicide, and same-sex civil unions and marriage. Many of these views are related to European support for the gap between Church and state.

Despite the central role that the Church has played in European public and political life over the centuries, it has never been a uniting force (Dunkerley et al., 2002, p. 115). First there was the division between the Latin and Orthodox Churches, then the division between the Catholic and Protestant Churches, and more recently there has been the rise of religious diversity as new immigrants have brought Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and other religions into the equation. During the discussions over the European constitutional treaty, it was suggested that the preamble should include reference to the Christian heritage of Europe, but this was turned down on the grounds that it would not reflect the religious diversity of the new Europe, and would send a particularly worrying message to Muslims and Jews (see discussion in Schlesinger and Foret, 2006).

European society has also been distinguished by important demographic changes that are routinely quoted as sources of concern and as indicating weaknesses in the future success of Europe. Prime among these has been the aging of European societies and declining birth rates, the combination of

Box 2.3 Promoting European culture

The stability of a state is usually predicated upon a high degree of legitimacy (public acceptance), which is in turn predicated upon a strong sense of national identity, in which a sense of a common culture is a critical element. Conversely, the instability of states often arises out of social and cultural divisions, which weaken the sense of a common national identity. France is an example of a state with a high level of cultural unity, while British national identity is weakened by divisions among the English, the Scots, the Welsh, and the Northern Irish, and Belgium is weakened by divisions between its Flemish and Wallonian communities.

Historically and culturally speaking, Europeans are insular and inward-looking, often knowing little about the history or culture of even their closest neighbours. The EU has tried to address this problem by promoting the idea of a common European culture (even though such promotion may be anathema to some – how can culture be legislated or 'promoted' as a policy goal?). Despite the results of Eurobarometer polls showing a majority in favour of cultural policy being left to the member states, Maastricht introduced a commitment that the EU would 'contribute to the flowering of the culture of the Member States' with a view to improving knowledge about the culture and history of Europe, conserving European cultural heritage, and supporting and supplementing non-commercial cultural exchanges and 'artistic and literary creation'.

What this has so far meant in practice has been spending money on restoring historic buildings, supporting training schemes in conservation and restoration, preserving regional and minority languages, subsidising the translation of works by European authors (particularly into less widely spoken languages), and supporting cultural events. For example, the EU has funded a Youth Orchestra and a Baroque Orchestra to bring young musicians together, declared since 1985 European 'Capitals of Culture' (including Graz in Austria, Genoa in Italy, and Cork in Ireland) and established a European Cultural Month in cities in non-member states (such as Basel, Cracow, and St Petersburg).

While the sentiments behind these projects are laudable, it is difficult to see how cultural exchanges and the development of a European cultural identity can work unless they are driven by Europeans themselves. It is easy to argue that Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Voltaire, Goethe, Picasso and Mozart are all part of the heritage of Europe, but the notion of promoting a modern pan-European popular culture is a beast of an entirely different stripe. Even the most mobile of art forms – film and rock music – come up against the barrier of national preferences, and little that is not produced in English has had commercial success outside its home market.

which has meant that the costs of health care and social security are falling on the shoulders of a shrinking workforce. A related factor has been the impact of immigration, which can be interpreted as an opportunity to make up for the problems posed by aging and population decline, but can also be interpreted as a problem in respect of the social and political conflict created by ethnic and religious cleavages.

In international relations, Europeans have a preference for multilateralism, the use of soft power (encouragement and opportunity) rather than hard power (coercion and force) (see Chapter 9), and for using civilian means for dealing with conflict. They take a liberal view of the international system, arguing that states can and must cooperate and work together on matters of shared interest, and placing an emphasis on the importance of international organizations and international law. The European view stands in particular contrast to that of the United States, which has a reputation (not always entirely deserved) for unilateralism, the promotion of national interests, an emphasis on military solutions to problems, and a distrust of international organizations. While Europeans have become used to working together, the United States has long been wary of alliances and jealously guards its independence. This can be seen in the contrasting positions of Europeans and Americans towards international peacekeeping efforts; while Europeans are willing to work through the United Nations and to commit their troops to joint commands, the United States refuses to allow its troops to wear the blue helmets of the United Nations or to allow them to be controlled by foreign officers or political leaders. Where many Europeans long ago acknowledged that they were citizens of an international system, and are prepared to act multilaterally, there are still many Americans for whom there are only two realistic options: American leadership, or isolationism.

The best-known recent analysis of the contrasting worldviews of the EU and the US was offered in 2003 by Robert Kagan, an American political commentator (Kagan, 2003). He argued that the two sides no longer share a common view of the world, and that 'Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus'. What he meant was that while Europe has moved into a world of laws, rules, and international cooperation, the United States believes that security and defence depend on the possession and use of military power. While the United States sees the world as divided between good and evil, and between friends and enemies, Europeans see a more complex global system, and prefer to negotiate and persuade rather than to coerce. Kagan argues that the differences are a reflection of the relative positions of the two actors in the world; when Europe was powerful it was willing to use violence to achieve its goals, while Americans had no choice but to use soft power. But now that they have traded places, they have also traded perspectives. Critics have taken issue with this analysis, arguing that Europeans do not use soft power because they have no choice, but precisely because they have a choice.

Europe is not a continent of pacifists, but one where the 'just' causes of war are actively debated and where there are different opinions about the role of military force (Menon *et al.*, 2004).

These four sets of features can help us pin down the nature of Europeanism, but – just as with its eastern borders – it is not easy to draw firm lines around the features, many of which are shared with other parts of the world. In geographical, political, economic, and social terms it has never been easy to pin down Europe, particularly given its enormous internal diversity. But one of the effects of integration has been to encourage more efforts to understand what Europeans have in common. There is still much resistance among political leaders, academics and Europeans themselves to the idea that generalizations can be drawn across national borders, but the common themes in both the meaning of Europe and in the values and norms that are represented by Europe are easier to identify today than ever before.

Conclusions

The idea of European unity is nothing new. The conflicts that brought instability, death, and changes to the balance of power in Europe over the centuries prompted many to propose unification – or at least the development of a common system of government – as a means to the achievement of peace. The rise of the state system undermined these proposals, but interstate conflict ultimately reached a level at which it became clear that only cooperation could offer a path to peace. The two world wars of the twentieth century – which in many ways began as European civil wars – emphatically underlined the dangers of nationalism and of the continued promotion of state interests at the expense of regional interests.

The new thinking has dramatically altered the idea of Europe over the past two generations, and the nature of the internal relationship among the states that make up Europe has changed out of all recognition. For the first time, the concept of European unity has found a widespread audience. The audience may not always have been enthusiastic, but there has been a generational shift since 1945 as those who witnessed the horrors of the Second World War are superseded by those who have known nothing but a general peace in the region. Where intellectuals and philosophers once argued in isolation that the surest path to peace in Europe was cooperation, or even integration, the costs of nationalism are now more broadly appreciated, ensuring a wider and deeper consideration of the idea of regional unity.

Europeans still have much that divides them, and those differences are obvious to anyone who travels across the region. There are different languages, cultural traditions, legal, education and health care systems, social priorities, cuisines, modes of entertainment, patterns of etiquette, styles of dress, ways of

planning and building cities, ways of spending leisure time, attitudes towards the countryside, and even sides of the road on which to drive (the British, Irish, Cypriots, and Maltese drive on the left, everyone else on the right). Europeans also have differences in the way they govern themselves, and in what they have been able to achieve with their economies and social welfare systems.

Increasingly, however, Europeans have more in common. The economic and social integration that has taken place under the auspices of the European Union and its precursors since the early 1950s has brought the needs and priorities of Europeans closer into alignment. It has also encouraged the rest of the world to see Europeans less as citizens of separate states and more as citizens of the same economic bloc, if not yet the same political bloc. Not only has there been integration from the Mediterranean to the Arctic Circle, but the 'lands between' – which spent the cold war as part of the Soviet bloc and part of the buffer created by the Soviet Union to protect its western frontier – are now becoming part of greater Europe for the first time in their history. The result has been a fundamental redefinition of the idea of Europe. In the next chapter we will look at the steps taken by European governments to build the European Union, the underlying motives of integration, and the debates involved in the process.

Chapter 3

The Evolution of the EU

The idea of 'Europe' may have been with us for centuries, but serious efforts to promote voluntary European unity date back less than 60 years. It was only after the Second World War that the theories about the possible benefits of European integration were finally tested in practice. The critical first step was taken on 9 May 1950, at a press conference held at the French Foreign Ministry in Paris. To the attendant journalists, French foreign minister Robert Schuman announced a plan under which Europe's national coal and steel industries would be brought together under the administration of a single joint authority.

The European Coal and Steel Community was founded in 1952 with just six member states (France, West Germany, Italy and the three Benelux countries), but from this modest first step a complex process of experimentation, political action, opportunism, intrigue, crisis and serendipity would eventually lead to the European Union as we know it today. The original priorities were threefold: postwar economic construction, the desire to prevent European nationalism leading once again to conflict, and the need for security in the face of the threats posed by the cold war. At the core of this thinking was concern about the traditional hostility between France and Germany, and the argument that if these two could cooperate it might provide the foundations for broader European integration.

The next step was the creation in 1958 of the European Economic Community, with the same six members but a more ambitious set of goals. These included agreement on a common external tariff for all goods coming into the Community, the development of a single market, within which there would be free movement of people, goods, money, and services, and a common agricultural policy. As it became clear that the Community was working, other countries applied for full or associate membership. The first enlargement came in 1973 with the accession of Britain, Denmark, and Ireland, followed in the 1980s by Greece, Portugal, and Spain, and in 1995 by Austria, Finland and Sweden.

The single market was given a much-needed boost in 1986 with agreement of the Single European Act, setting a five-year deadline for removal of the remaining barriers. There was progress, too, on monetary union, with the launch in 1999 of the euro. Enlargement remained high on the agenda, the focus shifting to Eastern Europe. After lengthy preparations, 12 new mainly