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# European Union on the international stage

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## **Abstract:**

*The EU is facing crucial external challenges for its present and future stability, security and prosperity. The instability in the Middle East, terrorism, the global warming and environmental change issue, the world’s growing economic globalization and its outsiders, or the political and economical competition with the Chinese and Indian giants leading to increasingly rival partnerships must be properly understood and assessed in the full extend of their implications and consequences, and addressed by appropriate policies. But the future of EU’s role as an international actor is also being decisively shaped today by the challenges the EU faces from its Eastern neighborhood which are likely to have fundamental long term economical and political consequences on the EU. These challenges directly influence EU’s stability, security and prosperity and ability to be an international actor capable of identifying its interests, and successfully pursuing or protecting them.*

**Keywords:** foreign, relations, enlargement, world, actor.

JEL classification: F00, F15, N1.

## I. ABOUT EUROPEAN UNION

Before becoming a real political objective, the idea of uniting Europe was just a dream in the minds of philosophers and visionaries. Victor Hugo, for example, imagined a peaceful “United States of Europe” inspired by humanistic ideals. The dream was shattered by the terrible wars that ravaged the continent during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, a new kind of hope emerged from the rubble of World War Two. People who have resisted totalitarianism during the war were determined to put an end to international hatred and rivalry in Europe and create the conditions for lasting peace. Between 1945 and 1950, a handful of courageous statesmen including Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer, Alcide de Gasperi and Winston Churchill set about persuading their peoples to enter a new era. New structures would be created in Western Europe, based on shared interests and founded upon treaties guaranteeing the rule of law and equality between all countries.

Robert Schuman (French foreign minister) took up an idea originally conceived by Jean Monnet and on 9 May 1950, proposed establishing a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). In countries which had once fought each other, the production of coal and steel would be pooled under a common High Authority. In a practical but also richly symbolic way, the raw materials of war were being turned into instruments of reconciliation and peace<sup>1</sup>. [1]

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<sup>1</sup> Fontaine Pascal – “Europe in 12 lessons” – Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg, Belgium, 2006

Today, the European Union (EU) is an economic and political union of 27 member states, located primarily in Europe. It was established by the Treaty of Maastricht on 1 November 1993<sup>2</sup> [2] upon the foundations of the pre-existing European Economic Community. With almost 500 million citizens, the EU combined generates an estimated 30% share (US \$ 16.8 trillion in 2007) of the nominal gross world product<sup>3</sup>. [3]

The EU has developed a single market through a standardized system of laws which apply in member states, guaranteeing the freedom of movement of people, goods, services and capital<sup>4</sup>. It maintains a common trade policy, agricultural and fisheries policies, and a regional development policy. Sixteen member states have adopted a common currency, the Euro. It has developed a role in foreign policy, representing its members in the World Trade Organisation, at

G8 summits and at the United Nations. Twenty-one EU countries are members of NATO. The EU has developed a role in justice and home affairs, including the abolition of passport controls between many member states under the Schengen Agreement, which also incorporates non-EU member states<sup>5</sup>.

As it was said before, the European Union is composed of 27 independent sovereign countries which are known as member states: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

There are three official candidate countries, Croatia, the Republic of Macedonia and Turkey. The western Balkan countries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia are officially recognized as potential candidates<sup>6</sup>. Kosovo is also listed by the European Commission as a potential candidate but the Commission does not list it as an independent country because not all member states recognize it as an independent country, separate from Serbia.

To join the EU, a country must meet the Copenhagen criteria, defined at the 1993 Copenhagen European Council. These require a stable democracy which respects human rights and the rule of law; a functioning market economy capable of competition within the EU; and the acceptance of the obligations of membership, including EU law. Evaluation of a country's fulfillment of the criteria is the responsibility of the European Council.<sup>7</sup> The current framework does not specify how a country could exit the Union (although Greenland, a Territory of Denmark, withdrew in 1985), but the proposed Treaty of Lisbon contains a formal procedure for withdrawing.

Four Western European countries that have chosen not to join the EU have partly committed to the EU's economy and regulations: Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway are a part of the single market through the European Economic Area, and Switzerland has similar

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<sup>2</sup> Craig, Paul; Grainne De Burca, P. P. Craig (2006). *EU Law: Text, Cases and Materials* (4th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 15. ISBN 978-0-19-927389-8.; "Treaty of Maastricht on European Union"

<sup>3</sup> "World Economic Outlook Database, April 2008 Edition". International Monetary Fund. April 2008.

<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2008/01/weodata/weorept.aspx?sy=2006&ey=2008&ssd=1&sort=country&ds=.&br=1&c=998&s=NGDPD%2CPPP&grp=1&a=1&pr.x=46&pr.y=7>. Retrieved on 3 May 2008. "Gross domestic product, current prices; U.S. dollars, Billions; 2007 = 16,830.100, 2008=18,493.009. Gross domestic product based on purchasing-power-parity (PPP) valuation of country GDP; Current international dollar, Billions; 2007 = 14,712.369;2008 = 15,282.118"

<sup>4</sup> European Commission. "The EU Single Market: Fewer barriers, more opportunities". Europa web portal.

[http://ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/index_en.htm). Retrieved on 27 September 2007. "Activities of the European Union: Internal Market". Europa web portal. [http://europa.eu/pol/singl/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/pol/singl/index_en.htm). Retrieved on 29 June 2007

<sup>5</sup> "Abolition of internal borders and creation of a single EU external frontier". Europa web portal. 2005.

[http://ec.europa.eu/justice\\_home/fsj/freetravel/frontiers/fsj\\_freetravel\\_schengen\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/fsj/freetravel/frontiers/fsj_freetravel_schengen_en.htm). Retrieved on 24 January 2007.

<sup>6</sup> "Declaration of 9 May 1950". European Commission. [http://europa.eu/abc/symbols/9-may/decl\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/abc/symbols/9-may/decl_en.htm). Retrieved on 5 September 2007.

<sup>7</sup> "Accession criteria (Copenhagen criteria)".

Europa web portal. [http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession\\_criteria\\_copenhagen\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhagen_en.htm). Retrieved on 26 June 2007

ties through bilateral treaties.<sup>8</sup> The relationships of the European microstates Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, and Vatican City include the use of the euro and other areas of co-operation.<sup>9</sup>

The EU is often described as being divided into three areas of responsibility, called *pillars*. The original European Community policies form the first pillar, while the second consists of Common Foreign and Security Policy. The third pillar originally consisted of Justice and Home Affairs, however owing to changes introduced by the Amsterdam and Nice treaties; it currently consists of Police and Judicial Co-operation in Criminal Matters.

In economic, trade and monetary terms, the European Union has become a major world power. However, some have described the EU as an economic giant but a political dwarf. This is an exaggeration. It has considerable influence within international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the specialised bodies of the United Nations (UN), and at world summits on the environment and development.

Nevertheless, it is true that the EU and its members have a long way to go, in diplomatic and political terms, before they can speak with one voice on major world issues like peace and stability, relations with the United States, terrorism, the Middle East and the role of the UN Security Council. What is more, the cornerstone of national sovereignty, namely military defence systems, remain in the hands of national governments, whose ties are those forged within alliances such as NATO.

## II. INTERNATIONAL POLITIC ACTORS

As an exchange society with a libertarian political system, international relations form a sociocultural field. It is a space of states and transnational related groups and individuals. Its dimensions define world culture, stratification (wealth, power and prestige) and classes. Its medium consists of international meanings, values, and norms. Seated in this medium, its forces are generated by interests. And its dynamics comprise the conflict helix.

Of all modern societies, contemporary international relations are closest to a social field. Interactions are primarily spontaneous and free market processes largely determine fundamental relations. No one plans what the society will be like. There is no overarching organizational structure which coercively commands behaviour. And relations among members of the world society comprise multiple and overlapping local, regional, and international expectations dependent on the interests, capabilities, and credibility (wills) of the parties involved. In other words, the international order is sewn together by diverse and cross-cutting balances of social powers.

Statesmen act towards goals (interests) in a context of these multiple balances; they "speak out of an environment" (Sprout and Sprout, 1962); they are restrained by a complex of rules they implicitly accept; they have finely tuned expectations about the behaviour of others; they approach issues gingerly lest some balances somewhere, at some level, be upset, conflict ensues, and a new, unpredictable and possibly less desirable balance results.

But statesmen are not the only actors, or other statesmen the only concern.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, who, more specifically, are the actors in the international field?

It can be identified at least six types of actors in the contemporary global system.

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<sup>8</sup>"The EU's relations with Switzerland".

Europa web portal. [http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/switzerland/intro/index.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/switzerland/intro/index.htm). Retrieved on 16 September 2007

<sup>9</sup> European Commission. "Use of the euro in the world". *The euro outside the euro area*. Europa web portal. [http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/the\\_euro/euro\\_in\\_world9369\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/the_euro/euro_in_world9369_en.htm). Retrieved on 27 February 2008

<sup>10</sup> R.J. Rummel – "Understanding Conflict and War: War, power, peace; Vol.4" - Published by Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, California, 1979

- The first type is the **interstate governmental** actor (IGO) composed of governmental representatives from more than one state. Sometimes known as “international” or “supranational” organisation, depending upon their degree of autonomy, they include as members two or more national governments. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the number of such organisations has increased even more rapidly than has the number of nation-states. Examples of this type of actor include military alliances such as NATO and the Warsaw Pact, universal organisation such as the League of Nations or the United Nations, and special purpose organisations such as the European Union (EU) and the Universal Postal Union (UPU). In 1972 there were at least 280 such actors in the international system.

- A second type is the **interstate nongovernmental** actor. Sometimes referred to as “transnational” or “cross-national”, this type of actor encompasses individuals who reside in several nation-states but who do not represent any of the governments of these states. According to the Yearbook of International Organisations, there were at least 7,000 in 1970 compared to 40,000 in 1995. These groups are functionally diverse and include religious groups such as the International Council of Jewish Women, the Salvation Army, and the World Muslim Congress; trade unions such as the Caribbean Congress of Labour and the World Confederation of Labour; and social welfare organisations such as the International Red Cross or Kiwanis International. While many of these actors seek to avoid involvement in politically-sensitive questions, some behave autonomously and do become so embroiled. This is illustrated by the role of the International Red Cross in the Nigerian-Biafra civil war and the conflict culminating in 1968 between Standard of New Jersey’s subsidiary, the International Petroleum Corporation, and the government of Peru. The multinational corporation in particular is becoming a major transnational actor, rendering more obsolete the state-centric model of international interaction.

- A third type of actor is commonly known as **the nation-state**. It consists of personnel from the agencies of a single central government. Though often regarded as unified entities, national governments are often more usefully identified in terms of their parts such as ministries and legislatures. On occasion, the “parts” may behave autonomously with little reference to other government bureaucracies. “The apparatus of each national government,” declares Graham Allison “constitutes a complex arena for the international game.” The ministries that make up large governments bargain with each other and regularly approach “national questions with parochial or particular views; each may view the “national interest” from a different standpoint.

For instance, it has been alleged that the American Central Intelligence Agency has, on occasion, formulated and carried out policy independently and without the complete knowledge or approval of elected officials.

- There is the **governmental no central** actor composed of personnel from regional, parochial, or municipal governments within a single state or of colonial officials representing the state. Such parochial bureaucracies and officials generally are only peripherally concerned with world politics or, at most, have an indirect impact on the global political system. Occasionally, however, they have a direct impact when they serve as the core of secessionist movements or when they establish and maintain direct contact with other actors. In this context, the provincial officials of Katanga, Biafra, and in the 1860s the American South come to mind.

Table 1

## The Realist Paradigm and Integrationist Findings

Assumption of political realism as applied to international relations	Findings of integration studies in the 1950's and 1960's	Impacts on the discipline of international relations
States and nation-states are the only consequential actors in international relations	States and nation-states are not the only consequential actors in international relations	Orthodoxy was brought into question
International relations results from foreign policies directed toward enhancing national security	International relations result from foreign policies directed toward enhancing national welfare	Orthodoxy was brought into question and theoretical analyses were initiated
International relations are fundamentally conflict processes played out in zero-sum matrices	International relations are fundamentally collaborative processes played out in positive sum matrices	Orthodoxy was brought into question and theoretical and empirical inquires were initiated

**Source:** R.L. Merritt and Bruce M. Russett – “From National Development to Global Community” – George Allen and Unwind, London, 1981, p. 149

- A fifth type is the **intrastate nongovernmental actor consisting of nongovernmental groups or individuals** located primarily within a single state. Again, this type of actor is generally thought of as subject to the regulation of a central government, at least in matters of foreign policy. Yet, such groups, ranging from philanthropic organizations and political parties to ethnic communities, labor unions, and industrial corporations may, from time to time, conduct relations directly with autonomous actors other than their own government. In this category, we find groups as disparate as the Ford Foundation, Oxfam, the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities, the Jewish Agency, and the Irish Republican Army.

- Finally, individuals in their private capacity are, on occasion, able to behave autonomously in the global arena. Such “international” individuals were more common before the emergence of the nation-state, particularly as diplomatic or military mercenaries. More recently, one might think of the American industrialist Andrew Carnegie who willed ten million dollars for “the speedy abolition of war between the so-called civilized nations,” the Swedish soldier Count Gustaf von Rosen who was responsible for creating a Biafra air force during the Nigerian civil war, or the Argentine revolutionary Ché Guevara.

There are at least **four general types of tasks** that can be performed by actors:

1. Physical protection or security which involves the protection of men and their values from coercive deprivation either by other members within the group or by individuals or groups outside it.

2. Economic development and regulation which comprise activities that are intended to overcome the constraints imposed on individual or collective capacity for self-development and growth by the scarcity or distribution of material resources.

3. Residual public interest tasks which involve activities that are designed to overcome constraints other than economic, such as disease or ignorance, that restricts individual or collective capacity for self-development and growth.

4. Group status which refers to the provision of referent identification through collective symbols that bind the individual to others, provide him with psychological and emotional security, and distinguish him in some manner from others who are not members of

the group. Such symbols are often grounded in ethnicity, nationality, class, religion, and kinship.

The behavior of actors in the global system involves the performance of one or more of the foregoing tasks in cooperation or competition with other actors responding to the actual or anticipated demands of their “constituencies.” Although governments of nation-states customarily perform these tasks “domestically,” tasks become relevant at the “international” level when a government acts to protect its citizens from externally-imposed change or to adapt them to such change. For example, the regulation of the domestic economy to create and sustain full employment is not itself an internationally-relevant task. When, however, tariffs are imposed on imports or the currency is devalued, the behavior acquires significance for the global system. Others outside the state are affected and made to bear the burdens of the “domestic” economic adjustment.

The increasing size and complexity of systems and institutions threaten individuals with a sense of helplessness in a world dominated by large impersonal forces where rapid change and “future shock” are common. Many small and new nation-states are only barely (if at all) able to provide physical security, economic satisfaction, or social welfare for their citizens. On the other hand, often they do provide their citizens with an emotionally-comforting sense of national identity and “in-group” unity. In this respect these states (as well as some nonstate units) can be seen as rather specialized actors in an increasingly interdependent world.

One of these actors performing on the world’s stage is the European Union who is fighting to become a superpower just like USA.

### III. EUROPEAN UNION – ACTOR ON THE WORLD’S STAGE

The European Community has contributed to raising the standard of living in Europe, through the establishment of a Common Market, as well as to the emergence of Europe as an entity with international visibility. Starting in the 1950, the EC undertook an active foreign policy, building a network of relations with both developed and developing nations, on every continent. Its trade policy often served as a proxy for a full-blown foreign policy as the latter had hardly been worked out among the EC’s member nations.

The Treaty of Maastricht gave birth to the European Union (EU) and with it a host of new powers and new authority in both economic (common currency) and non-economic areas (health, culture, etc.). With it also came the first official status for policies of international aid as well as mechanisms for foreign policy and security issues. This development is far from complete since the economic weight of the EU far outstrips its political dimensions, while the latter have not yet been fully recognised in all international quarters. Even if the EU is a member of the WTO (World Trade Organisation), it is not a member of the International Monetary Fund despite the euro’s weight as the world number two currency.

In order to gain its place among world players, the EU must successfully carry out its planned expansion and draw all the benefit possible from a larger union; in doing so it will better be able to influence the policies set by international bodies (UN, WTO, etc.) while putting forth its own model of society. There is work to be done; continuing to build strategic partnerships, straightening out contradictions in the Union’s own priorities, and taking a hard look at its institutional functioning. Dividing up responsibilities among the three “pillar” member-states, who in turn share them with other members, makes leading a coherent and visible foreign policy a delicate task.

The EU does not have yet a clear international legal identity and this does not help matters when it comes to building an international image. Top-heavy decisions structures

make it difficult to conduct a foreign policy. The Treaty of Lisbon represents an attempt to respond to these challenges by giving the EU the means it needs to stand as a visible, credible, and effective actor on the world scene.

The Yugoslavian wars and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 served as a stiff reminder that strategic objectives are still the basis for international relations even after the end of the Cold War. They have also shown up the weak-heartedness of the European Union as an international actor. Conflict resolution in Bosnia in 1995 and then in Kosovo in 1999 was the result of military intervention by NATO and by the US, and can be credited to American diplomatic efforts. Even if EU activity could not be said to be nonexistent, its member states proved incapable of giving any teeth to its paper tiger, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), in response to the first full-scale war on European soil since 1945. The EU nevertheless appears to have learned some lessons from this experience, as seen at the Helsinki summit (December, 1999) when member states committed themselves to launching a rapid-reaction military capability.

Europe is now determined to be active on all parallel fronts of what can be called global politics, by making its presence felt on questions of world trade, environmental action (Kyoto protocol), humanitarian action (the European programme ECHO), and civil resolutions to international crises (including post-conflict reconstruction aid). The EU's actions include the establishment of a network of institutionalised relations with UN agencies, developing countries, and major powers. In a series of positions taken, Europe has set itself apart from the United States (defending the International Crimes Court and the Kyoto protocol, maintaining close ties with the Mediterranean Arab world, refusing unilateralism on Iraq), while a number of trans-Atlantic trade conflicts brought before the WTO has made manifest Europe's divergent approach to the regulation of globalisation. This growing affirmation of the existence of the EU in an international setting is a sure sign of the rise of a future "global actor" if not superpower.

Indeed, the EU continues to play an active role in international affairs regardless of decision-making method. The EU executed a number of significant actions after 1993, ranging from the Euro-Mediterranean and EU-Russian Partnership to the New Transatlantic Agenda and Joint Action Plan; from leading the implementation of the civilian aspects of the Dayton Peace Accords to undertaking global diplomatic initiatives to gain support for the renewal of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and placing controls on antipersonnel land mines; and from facilitating negotiations for peace and stability pacts between Eastern Europe states with border and ethnic disputes to providing the Palestinian Authority with the world's largest aid package to help establishing conditions for a civil society.

Some scholars said that the EU is neither a state nor a nonstate actor, and neither a conventional international organisation nor an international regime.

The EU, like single state actors, is influenced by the shifting currents of international politics and outside demands for the EU to act internationally whether or not it is ready or capable. Foreign crises, embargoes, wars, human suffering, impact heavily on the EU and help explain responses. It cannot, nor does it want to, hide from the world. Explanations of EFP require an appreciation of how the outside world causes the EU to respond to such stimuli.

The currents of global politics influence the EU to respond with actions rooted not in the internal market but in the international system. Certain EFP actions reflect a unique European brand of diplomacy and foreign policy moulded by an internal dynamic of cooperation among members and common institutions.

#### IV. THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN UNION

Major challenges to the future of Europe lie ahead. If the great experiment succeeds, it will create an economic, political and military force to pose real challenges to the United States, with its enlargement to 25 countries and a population approaching 500 million. Expansion will add 23% to the EU's land area and bring in 75 million additional citizens, with a combined economy of \$9.3 trillion, approaching that of the U.S.

Expansion is a costly business: EU subsidies to the Eastern countries will be \$40 billion between 2004 and 2006, a large slice of the annual \$97 billion Brussels budget. And that is unlikely to scratch the surface. Anyone following the decline of Germany's economy cannot fail to recognize the immense investment of resources by old West Germany into the East, for little economic return.

Just visit smaller towns and cities in places like Slovakia or the Czech Republic, dominated still by Stalin-influenced mass-housing projects and decaying ex-communist infrastructure. Many of those 75 million new Euro citizens are existing on average incomes of no more than \$450 a month, yet will have an expectation of the same kinds of economic and social rights that those in France, Germany and Britain take for granted. They will also find themselves bound by tens of thousands of EU directives, such as rules on food preparation and hygiene in restaurants, which will be impossibly expensive to implement without help.

Deutsche Bank studies of GDP growth, productivity and other factors suggest it will take Slovenia, the most developed country, up to a decade to catch up with the EU average. The problem is most acute for Poland, the largest country in the new group, with a population of 39 million. The economy ground to a halt in 2002 with unemployment of 17% in early 2003. At current rates it could take 40 years for Poland to reach average EU living standards.

Tensions may grow if workers in the West feel their jobs are not only moving East, but also their own tax money, which is being used to rebuild nations they care little about. If the EU continues as planned, a Greater Europe will rebalance unequal power struggles on the world stage, currently dominated by America even though America is consistently out-voted on many issues. But if the European experiment fails, it will disintegrate eventually into conflict and chaos.

The most likely scenario for the future of the EU over the next decade and a half will be slow but steady progress towards integration, held back by the rich diversity of cultures and economic situations. A Greater Europe cannot be built without strong EU governance and visionary leadership, yet these are the two issues which are notably missing at present. The European Parliament does not command the same sense of respect as national Parliaments, nor the connection with ordinary people. This is a serious problem. Who makes decisions in Europe anyway? Is it EU councils of Ministers who are appointed by their own governments? Is it elected representatives of the people (MEPs)? And that is the heart of the problem.

Culture differences are profound and deeply sensitive. Take language for example. In France there is great resentment about the dominance of the English language and it is illegal to play too many English songs on the radio. It is hard to imagine such a profound division between different States of America.

Passions of large numbers of people within the EU can be easily inflamed by insensitive decrees from Brussels, or by "unfair" treatment by one country of another. Disputes over beef, lamb, asylum seekers, chocolate, Iraq and so on are not just superficial. They often hide very long, historical issues and profound resentments. Finding a way through will mean finding a common EU voice, a clear moral lead from a commanding EU figurehead who will bring confidence and clarity. The current system of a 6 monthly rotating leader is unsustainable, confusing, destabilizing and makes effective leadership impossible.

The European model is changing forever with rapid expansion to the East, doubling the number of countries and embracing nations that are extremely poor in comparison. Governance will be complex (we don't even have an elected President), and so will be the culture mix. Face the facts: ethnic cleansing is a daily reality in Europe - even in the UK. Every night somewhere in Belfast we see sectarian attacks and every morning the removal vans arrive to take another family away to another location. It is the same in Bosnia, and Kosovo, both part of old Yugoslavia, yet another part of the same old nation is entering the EU: Slovenia.

So here we have nations rushing to become one, who cannot even stop people in the same street butchering each other because they want to be so different. So expect growth, extension, vast economic trading areas, and with it growing tensions, xenophobia and resentment.<sup>11</sup>

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