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Conference Report:

*Beyond the Progressive Story: Reframing Resistance to European  
Integration*

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*Beyond the Progressive Story: Reframing Resistance to European Integration.* Conference organized by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research (HIS) in cooperation with the German Historical Institutes in Rome, London, and Warsaw, held at the HIS, 29–31 March 2023. Conveners: Philipp Müller (HIS), Wolfgang Knöbl (HIS), Martin Baummeister (GHI Rome), Christina von Hodenberg (GHI London), and Miloš Řezník (GHI Warsaw).

The conference took an alternative approach to the history of European integration by focusing on sceptics, critics, and alternative paths and visions. Part of a project on the history of Euroscepticism funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research, it brought together Ph.D. researchers, postdocs, mid-career academics, and senior professors from a range of countries, including Greece, Germany, Italy, Poland, and the United Kingdom. It addressed the history of European integration from numerous perspectives, including economic, political, social, international, and institutional, as well as drawing in comments and contributions from colleagues in history, sociology, and the social sciences. In terms of chronology, the conference included papers and discussions on the interwar and post-war periods, as well as up to the 1990s and early 2000s. In his opening comments, Philipp Müller observed that it is essential to analyse and understand the changes and continuities in European integration over time, and to account not just for successes but also failures and alternatives. We have to move beyond the ‘progressive story’, in which integration has often been portrayed as only heading in one direction, as positive and progressive, and which risks taking the form of a teleological representation of a highly complex past. A core aim of this conference was therefore to move beyond such an approach by focusing on scepticism, criticism, and alternative versions of European integration history, with the aim of casting light on underappreciated actors, groups, voices, and themes.

After an introduction by the discussant and chair Philipp Müller, the keynote lecture by Kiran Klaus Patel (LMU Munich), titled ‘Putting

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the Permissive Consensus to Rest', addressed a multifaceted and layered history before an in-person and online audience. He tackled the 'permissive consensus', proposed a moratorium on the controversial term 'Eurosceptic', and observed that there never has been a 'golden age' in European integration history – it has always been contested. He also exposed his audience to an image of Winston Churchill's underpants. Thankfully, he provided an immediate explanation: he was not talking about clothing but the affectionate nickname for the flag of the European federalist movement, which features a large green E on the left interlocked with a smaller, reversed white C on the right. The colloquial reference, though, alludes to the commitment of the former British prime minister and his son-in-law, Duncan Sandys, to European cooperation and federalism. In 1950, Patel went on, Churchill's underpants were waved in the face of Paul-Henri Spaak. Held aloft as a symbol of the federalist movement, the flag was clearly present when Spaak spoke on European cooperation in front of a large crowd. However, he was not being cheered by the federalists, as one might expect considering his reputation as a founding father and 'saint' of European integration.<sup>1</sup> Rather, he was booed by the crowd.

As Patel showed, a considerable part of the European Community institutions' self-portrayal was based on making resistance to integration processes invisible. This is evidenced, for example, in the vague style of questioning in the Eurobarometer poll. The surveys consistently found a high level of support for 'the idea of European unification', even while respondents were unable to name a single concrete effect of the European Communities (EC). The pollsters took this as evidence of 'support for Europe', concealing the fragile factual basis of this claim. The conference as a whole was characterized by many similarly surprising subversions of expectations. It attempted to find a new framework for histories of European integration beyond the unbroken, conflict-free history of progress that dominates the self-portrayal of the European institutions. The assumption that Spaak and the federalists would have been on the same side demonstrates the considerable success of this story, as well as the need for new historical approaches.

<sup>1</sup> Alan Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation State* (London, 1999).

Obscuring resistance certainly was part of the institutions' political modus operandi, and it featured in the paper by Philip Bajon (Max Planck Institute for Legal History and Legal Theory). He explained how the 1966 Luxembourg Compromise served as one such mechanism: this 'gentlemen's agreement' between European Economic Community (EEC) member states guaranteed them the option to block decision-making on national 'vital interests'. However, the agreement lacked clarity, and it never set out what might constitute such a vital interest. This lack of clarity continued in the subsequent EC and European Union (EU). Disagreement was concealed behind the compromise, which facilitated the rise of consensus building ('silent voting', in Bajon's words) as a mode of decision-making. Victor Jaeschke (University of Potsdam) presented a similar case. In championing 'subsidiarity' as a potential 'cure for the Europe-weary', the European Commission and the member states introduced yet another vague and ill-defined concept in the hope of reducing contestation by delegating to lower levels. It was never clear how and which regional levels should have the right to their own sphere of decision-making, and different actors, such as the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the French President François Mitterrand, interpreted the principle in very different ways. This disagreement only became visible when actors, predominantly national governments, attempted to influence the way in which the concept would be defined legally, but was obscured by the ambiguous phrasing of the treaty of Maastricht. Jaeschke and Bajon provided accounts of two different strategies for containing resistance to integration and thereby moved beyond the progressive story.

Furthermore, moments of enlargement could also offer similar examples of conflict. After all, the EC and EU were and are projects of ordering space. When a given space is reordered, or when another spatial arrangement comes into interaction with it, one can expect some degree of contestation. Philipp Müller's contribution discussed one such example: in the late 1960s, the EC developed new foreign policy guidelines (European Political Cooperation) which were challenged by disagreements between member states over how to deal with Portugal and the Portuguese Empire. The dissatisfaction of West German and French business representatives, as well as foreign policy officials, with

the EC institutional approach to this question produced an alternative form of Europeanization through bilateral forums, whose spatial ordering actively bypassed the EC and stood in conflict with it, yet was no less European.

However, questions of enlargement not only produced alternative processes of Europeanization but also led to the promotion of new visions of Europe. In the case of Greece, Eleni Kouki (University of Athens) demonstrated how strongly Europe was connected to Greek national identity as a historical concept. When the military junta came to power in 1967, the EC decided to freeze Greece's entry negotiations and to block its association privileges. This led the junta to change its rhetoric on European integration and to construct a new vision of Europe that was more in line with its convictions: only a free Europe of nations with strong connections to the United States and NATO would guarantee the continent's freedom and save it from Communism. In both Müller's and Kouki's cases, accession, or the prospect of accession, provides a window into the contestation of the EC's spatial arrangements.

Antonio Carbone (GHI Rome) told a story of conflict between different territorial scales. He analysed the reactions of Italian and French farmers to the EC's southern enlargement plans (to admit Greece, Portugal, and Spain) during the 1970s and 1980s. Carbone demonstrated how the conflict of agricultural interests between Northern and Southern Europe, which divided not only Italy and France but also their respective national farmers' associations, structured the farmers' response to the EC's Common Agricultural Policy. This became visible in a Europeanization of protest practices. Here, again, different scales for ordering space intersected, leading to tension and contestation. As Olga Gontarska (GHI Warsaw) subsequently showed, pre-accession Poland also witnessed contestation around international cooperation in the 1990s. The journal *Arka* was a forum of transnational exchange based on certain networks formed by Polish historians during the Cold War. Through it, American neo-conservative voices were introduced into the debate on European cooperation, and their networks with Polish historians produced their own vision of transnational cooperation which was at odds with Polish membership of the EU.

Larissa Kraft (University of Glasgow) explored how French policymakers created and promoted narratives in response to the rearrangement of space during the first British application to join the EEC in 1961–3. They emphasized the Franco-German relationship over the Franco-British one, portraying it as more European. As noted in the discussion, this was all the more remarkable given the background of Second World War alliances. In this sense, Kraft’s contribution was a further reminder of the contested nature of the different visions of ‘Europe’.

Not only were the spaces of the EC/EU rearranged, but there were also changes to the nature of other European organizations, as well as questions over which institution would become the dominant forum. Certain actors felt or anticipated this and reacted accordingly. Here, David Lawton (GHI London) offered an example by focusing on a group of British lawyers who won the right to a judicial review of the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. Lawyers, Lawton argued, were uniquely qualified to remake British Euroscepticism during the Maastricht period. Their expertise afforded them an awareness of the opportunity provided by treaty reform. However, their reliance on arguments of British legal exceptionalism was founded on a certain ambiguity, underwritten as it was by their contact with other constitutional challengers of the EC/EU, for instance in Denmark and Germany.

Katharina Troll (HIS) used the example of the Council of European Industrial Federations—founded in 1949 to represent European industrial interests and to advise the Organization for European Economic Cooperation—to demonstrate how economic actors responded to European integration and, as a consequence, Europeanized in the 1950s and early 1960s. The work of the council was characterized by conflicts over the correct path of integration and by the articulation of alternatives to supranational integration, mainly within the framework of the OEEC. It was a contested area, with competing institutions.

Here, there is a clear dialogue with the work of Alexander Hobe (HIS), who showed how the plans for the European Defence Community (EDC) in the 1950s incentivized Wehrmacht veterans to form a European umbrella association. However, their Europeanization developed its own dynamics, which were not purely reactive, and

after the EDC failed, their organization set out on a separate path. In all three of the cases presented by Lawton, Troll, and Hobe, plans for reordering European institutions created the conditions for their contestation. This followed different trajectories: a head-on challenge of treaty reform, as in Lawton's case, a tactical weighing of alternatives, as in Troll's, or the abandonment of a seemingly dead-end path, as in Hobe's. The variable relationship between the 'official' European framework and its 'challengers' was further underlined by insights from Johannes Großmann (University of Tübingen). He showed that while the 'Conservative International'—consisting of several elite circles and including the European Documentation and Information Centre think tank—produced alternative visions of integration, the post-war decades also saw these groups adapt to the hegemonic framework as an unintended consequence of their interactions.

During the lively three-day conference, all of these examples of contestation over the extent and form of European integration and cooperation revealed a remarkably conflicted history. Whether exploring conflicts over attempts to render resistance invisible, spatial elements, or alternative forms of cooperation and integration, the conference was rich with accounts and papers that went beyond the progressive story. Actors, groups, governments, organizations, and themes all revealed the contested past of European integration, and, as Kiran Klaus Patel argued, there was no 'golden age' to be found. What is clear, though, is that when it comes to moving beyond the progressive story, much remains to be explored and accounted for.

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