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The European Community and the Crises of the 1960s: Negotiating the Gaullist Challenge

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Piers Ludlow?s book will be of interest to all those who are concerned with the current crisis of the European Union. Indeed, by analysing the causes and effects of the first European Community crisis of the 1960s it may shed some light on the current debate on the future of the European Union, its capacity to recover from the French and Dutch referendums on the draft constitutional Treaty and cope with future challenges. Based on archival research, the book seeks to present a supranational history of the EC, to analyse the integration process in action: focusing on the multiplicity of actors (member states, EC institutions and officials) and their interactions, and replacing them within a wider international context, it avoids the obvious pitfall of placing too much emphasis on influential personalities like Charles de Gaulle or Walter Hallstein.

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The book deals with the two main crises that the newborn EC had to cope with in the 1960s: the French veto of the British bid to join the EC, and the 'empty chair' crisis following de Gaulle?s objection to proposals for an extension to majority voting. Then, like now, the issues at stake were the enlargement process, institutional balance within the EC institutional framework, the scope of common policies like the common agricultural policy and its compatibility with EC international commitments and, last but not least, the issue of sharing the EC financial burden amongst the member states. Through the analysis of those issues, Ludlow highlights the difficult choices facing Europe over its policy agenda, its institutional make up, and its membership, in sum, what the EC should do, how it should operate and who should belong to it. His argument is that those questions were left intentionally unanswered during the negotiation of the Treaty of Rome for the sake of the EC: 'the what, how and whom of early integration were all equally undefined' (p. 4). This degree of ambiguity and idealism on which the EC was built allowed the first years to be a real success, each member state hoping that its preferred areas of activity and its own agenda would be given priority. Later on, as these hopes were disappointed, as they began realising the costs of the integration process, divergent views and expectations re-entered the foreground and led to inevitable clashes. Ludlow describes at length the divergent views and interests of each member state, the interplay between these interests and those of EC institutions, and considers the role ? or rather the failed role ? of the European Commission as a political mediator and as the main arbiter in the Community?s agenda. He shows how the consensus, compromise and mutual trust of the first years were shaken by what he calls the 'Gaullist challenge', only to be restored after the Hague Summit in 1969. He goes on to analyse the need for leadership at a time when the EC lacked a clear sense of direction, and the way in which the leadership gap was filled through summits like The Hague.

The book is also very interesting for what it reveals about the long-term transformation of Europe and the way crises (including the current one) may be overcome: institutional pragmatism and underlying commitment to the political nature EC projects helped managing crises while consolidating the 'acquis'. For instance, Piers Ludlow shows that despite de Gaulle?s 'barking' against supranationality, French civil servants worked hard to soften the impact of the empty chair crisis, to ensure that the EC could work properly and that French interests in the EC were safeguarded. He also points out that despite the crisis, this period experienced a steady advance as far as the CAP and the customs union were concerned: 'what mattered was that the balance of institutions that had emerged over the Community?s first years of operation had been tested by crisis, had survived largely unscathed and had been strengthened as a result' (p. 213). The Commission and Parliament remained important players, the European Court of Justice proceeded with its judicial activism, the council, despite non-majority voting, consolidated its position as the main decision maker. The Luxembourg compromise was another example of institutional pragmatism and political commitment amongst the six. According to Ludlow, it underlines first that all member states, France included, recognised the status of the Treaty of Rome as the unquestioned basis for cooperation and the continuing possibility of using qualified majority voting. But

> once this important legal and political principle had been reaffirmed, all of the six were prepared to show a strong degree of pragmatism about the way in which majority voting would be used in practice. [...] The recognition by all of the member state governments that majority voting was a potentially dangerous device that would have to be deployed with caution and only in certain circumstances ? a recognition that had arguably been there long before the crisis had begun ? was made that much more explicit. Again, the outcome made it likely that the Community would carry on as before rather than changing radically (pp. 121?122).

The Luxembourg compromise was in line with the basic national interests of these states which continued to dominate the integration process and continued to held divergent views about how the Community should work. Eventually, it led to the idea of a hybrid kind of community, neither wholly federal, nor wholly intergovernmental.

To conclude, *The European Community and the Crises of the 1960s* highlights once more the benefits of analysing the past in order to understand the present. The argument is rich in detail and well conducted, considering all the possible aspects of the crises (institutional, political and international). It will be of interest not only to historians but also to political scientists who will find within its pages many comparisons to draw with the current EU crisis.

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