

## **Integration in Europe: A Theoretical Perspective on Unity and Diversity**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The different theories and thoughts surrounding the subject will be covered in detail in this Paper. This paper will be separated into sections that cover the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, carefully examining the literature related to the theories and concepts. Integration, Euroscepticism, and supranational vs intergovernmentalism are among the ideas that will be covered. Neofunctionalism served as the dominant theory of European integration in the early years of the European Union, while "integration theory" was political science speculation about the European Community. Since then, theories have become much more diverse. Since the 1960s, intergovernmentalist conceptions of European integration have competed with neofunctionalism. On the other side, and more significantly, European politics and policy conceptions have been added to European integration ideas. Theoretical work is now divided into two categories: theories of European integration as institutional change and European governance as politics, decision-making, and policy-making within a specific institutional framework.*

**Keywords:** European Union, Integration, Neo-functionalism, Intergovernmentalism, Functionalism

### **Introduction**

European integration represents a pivotal political and economic advancement of the 20th and 21st centuries. Since the conclusion of World War II, Europe's trajectory towards enhanced unity and collaboration has been characterised by both accomplishments and obstacles. This endeavour, frequently characterised as the amalgamation of various nations and populations under common institutions, has produced an extensive array of theoretical frameworks designed to comprehend and elucidate the intricacies of integration (Adriaan Schout, 2012). These theories underscore the intricacies of unifying a varied continent while also mirroring wider discussions over sovereignty, identity, and governance in a globalised context.

The theoretical framework of European integration is extensive and complex. It utilises political science, economics, sociology, and international relations, providing multiple perspectives to examine the factors promoting and obstructing integration. This article aims to examine the principal theoretical frameworks that have influenced academic and policy debates on Europe's integration, including functionalism, neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism, and post-functionalism. Each theory offers unique perspectives on the motivations, causes, and consequences of integration, emphasising the intricate equilibrium between unity and variety that is fundamental to the European endeavour (Amandine Crespy, 2009).

### **Historical Context of European Integration**

The historical trajectory of European integration is anchored in the tremendous damage wrought by World War II, which rendered the continent desolate, both physically and politically. The conflict revealed the disastrous effects of unrestrained nationalism and competition among European nations, leading to a new vision for Europe aimed at achieving peace, stability, and collaboration through integration. Leaders acknowledged that the one method to avert another fight of such scale was to cultivate interdependence among nations, hence reducing the likelihood of future wars (Anderson, 2006). This insight established the foundation for the European integration project, a daring political experiment that would influence the continent's future.

In the early aftermath of the war, Europe faced the combined challenges of economic recovery and the establishment of long-term peace. The United States significantly contributed to this process with the Marshall Plan (1948), which offered financial assistance to facilitate the reconstruction of the European economy. Nevertheless, in addition to economic recovery, European leaders acknowledged the necessity for political collaboration. Established in 1949, the Council of Europe served as a forum for conversation and collaboration, albeit with a predominantly symbolic nature and little capacity for enforceable agreements. The pivotal moment occurred in 1951 with the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). This represented the initial tangible measure towards European integration, aimed at consolidating the coal and steel sectors of six founding members: France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, under a supranational authority. The ECSC was pivotal since it sought to render war between France and Germany "not only unthinkable but materially impossible" through the integration of essential industries for battle. This audacious initiative initiated the integration process and set a precedent for collaboration via shared institutions (Billig, 2010).

Following the success of the ECSC, a significant advancement in European integration occurred in 1957 with the signing of the Treaty of Rome, which created the European Economic

Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom). The EEC sought to establish a unified market and progressively diminish trade barriers among its member nations. The notion of economic cooperation was founded on the premise that heightened economic interdependence would promote political unity. The EEC swiftly achieved success, resulting in accelerated economic growth and enhanced collaboration among its members (Brent F. Nelsen, 1994). The Treaty of Rome signified a transition from sectoral integration, exemplified by the ECSC, to a comprehensive economic framework, establishing the groundwork for the ultimate formation of the European Union. The EEC's success prompted additional nations to pursue membership, resulting in the initial enlargement in 1973, when the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Denmark became part of the community. The enlargement process persisted throughout the decades, evolving the EEC from a limited assembly of six members into a genuinely pan-European entity.

The disintegration of communism in Eastern Europe and the reunification of Germany in the late 20th century significantly expedited the integration process. The Maastricht Treaty, executed in 1992, established the European Union (EU) and introduced the notion of European citizenship, enabling persons to traverse and work freely among member states. It established the foundation for a singular currency, the euro, which was launched in 1999 and continues to be one of the EU's most notable accomplishments. The process of European integration has been intricate and dynamic, motivated by the aspirations for peace, economic prosperity, and political stability. The historical setting of European integration, from its post-war origins to the establishment of the EU, illustrates a persistent endeavour to unify a heterogeneous continent while addressing the complexities of state sovereignty and regional variation (Browne, 2008). The European project has transformed Europe's political and economic landscape through economic cooperation, collective governance, and the incremental enlargement of its membership.

### **Functionalism and Neofunctionalism: Drivers of Integration**

European integration, a very intricate political process of the 20th and 21st centuries, has been influenced by numerous theories seeking to elucidate its motivations and dynamics. Functionalism and neo-functionalism, among the earliest and most impactful theories, emphasise that collaboration in particular sectors can progressively foster deeper integration across many domains. These views underscore the significance of technical and economic collaboration as the basis for political unification, asserting that integration may be a progressive and self-reinforcing endeavour. Functionalism, conceived by British political theorist David Mitrany in the mid-20th century, arose as a reaction to the constraints of conventional state-centric international relations theories. Mitrany contended that enduring peace and security depend on collaboration in functional, non-political domains such as economy, transportation, and health, rather than exclusively on political or military alliances (Cameron, 2004). Functionalists claimed that states,

by collaborating on technological and economic matters, would progressively establish a network of interdependencies that may ultimately eliminate the need for political strife.

The core concept of functionalism is "spillover." When states collaborate in a certain domain, such as trade, it inherently necessitates collaboration in other interconnected domains, such as transportation infrastructure or financial regulation. This reliance would create momentum, promoting more integration and diminishing the significance of borders. Functionalism posits that integration initiates as a pragmatic, technocratic endeavour motivated by practical necessities rather than lofty political aspirations. It presupposes that the general populace will recognise the advantages of this collaboration, hence generating a need for greater integration. Mitrany's thesis was first practically applied in the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 (Davies, 2023). The ECSC was established to consolidate resources in essential industries, so rendering conflict between France and Germany, Europe's historical adversaries, unfeasible. The ECSC established a pragmatic basis for peace and collaboration by emphasising economic integration over political union, consistent with functionalist ideas. This methodology subsequently became the foundation for enhanced European integration.

Functionalism established the foundation for comprehending integration, whereas neo-functionalism refined and broadened the theory to incorporate political processes. Initiated by Ernst B. Haas in the 1950s, neo-functionalism expanded upon the fundamental concept of functionalism regarding sectoral collaboration, while highlighting the significance of political actors and institutions in advancing the process. Neofunctionalism developed the notion of "political spillover," wherein economic integration generates impetus for political unification. As states merge their economies, novel political difficulties emerge that necessitate coordinated solutions, resulting in the establishment of supranational institutions.

Neo-functionalism posits that supranational entities, including the European Commission and the European Court of Justice, are pivotal in directing the trajectory of integration. Upon establishment, they operate autonomously from national governments, advocating for enhanced collaboration and frequently surpassing the anticipations of the states that founded them (Dominguez, 2005). This establishes a dynamic in which integration intensifies in reaction to the intricacies of managing interdependence. Furthermore, non-state entities, such as commercial interest groups and trade unions, advocate for increased integration, as they get advantages from cohesive markets and regulatory structures. Functionalism and neo-functionalism have been essential in elucidating the catalysts of European integration. Functionalism highlighted the need for sectoral cooperation in promoting interdependence, whereas neo-functionalism broadened this perspective by acknowledging the political influences and institutional advancements resulting from economic collaboration. Collectively, these views elucidate the progression of European integration from a pragmatic response to post-war economic difficulties into a more

profound political and economic unity, as embodied by contemporary European unity. Both theories emphasise the significance of spillover effects, indicating that once integration commences, it typically generates momentum for enhanced cooperation across all sectors and government levels. Neofunctionalism emphasises "elite socialisation," wherein national leaders, via frequent interactions within supranational organisations, recognise the advantages of integration and become more inclined to relinquish sovereignty to a superior authority. This leads to a transition of political allegiances from the national to the European level, so expediting the integration process (Gifford C. , 2016).

### **Intergovernmentalism: The Primacy of the Nation-State in European Integration**

The process of European integration is distinctive and intricate, leading to the emergence of various conflicting theories that seek to elucidate its mechanisms and motivations. Intergovernmentalism is distinguished by its emphasis on the enduring supremacy of the nation-state in influencing the trajectory of integration. In contrast to views like neo-functionalism, which highlight the significance of supranational institutions and political spillover, intergovernmentalism asserts that national governments are the principal actors in the integration process, with their actions primarily influenced by national interests. (Holmes, 2001).

Intergovernmentalism, particularly as articulated by Stanley Hoffmann in the 1960s, serves as a counterpoint to more integrationist theories by positing that European integration progresses when it coincides with the sovereign interests of member states and diminishes or regresses when it jeopardises those interests. This viewpoint emphasises that integration is not an unavoidable, natural phenomenon, but rather a political endeavour that fluctuates based on the strategic inclinations of particular governments. Comprehending this theory necessitates an analysis of its fundamental principles, its relevance to the history of European integration, and its rebuttals to objections from alternative theoretical frameworks.

***Fundamental Tenets of Intergovernmentalism:*** Intergovernmentalism posits that states are rational entities with distinct preferences, which they pursue in the international sphere to safeguard their sovereignty and optimise their interests. Unlike neo-functionalism, which posits that supranational institutions independently and actively promote integration, intergovernmentalism contends that these institutions are subordinate to the decisions of national governments. (Julian Bergmann, 2015). States will collaborate solely in domains where they recognise reciprocal advantages, and this collaboration is frequently constrained by the limitations of national politics and public sentiment.

A fundamental aspect of intergovernmentalism is the principle that states maintain authority over essential domains of national policy, especially concerning foreign policy, defence, and taxes.

Hoffmann asserts that whereas nations may be inclined to share sovereignty in domains such as commerce or economic regulation, where the advantages of collaboration are evident and the sovereignty costs are little, they exhibit greater reluctance towards integration in politically sensitive matters. Intergovernmentalism posits that integration is mostly a pragmatic endeavour, wherein governments assess the costs and advantages of collaboration in light of their national interests. Intergovernmentalism underscores the significance of intergovernmental negotiations. From this perspective, European integration arises from talks among national governments, each with distinct preferences and non-negotiable boundaries. Decisions are made by consensus, and the result represents a compromise among the most influential states. (Julian Bergmann, 2015). Minor states may impact the process; nonetheless, dominant powers such as Germany and France are seen as the principal architects of integration, establishing the agenda and determining the results of discussions.

***Historical Utilisation of Intergovernmentalism:*** Intergovernmentalism arose as a key philosophy in the 1960s, during a period of advancing yet challenging European integration. Hoffmann's idea emerged as a critique of the perceived shortcomings of neo-functionalism. Neo-functionalists contended that integration would inevitably result in a spillover from economic collaboration to political unification; however, Hoffmann highlighted numerous pivotal occasions in European history to illustrate that this was not consistently true.

One of the important historical events that bolstered Hoffmann's theory was the "empty chair crisis" of 1965. The crisis arose after French President Charles de Gaulle retracted France's delegates from European Economic Community (EEC) meetings in opposition to proposed alterations that would have transferred greater authority to supranational entities. De Gaulle's actions underscored the constraints of integration, since France, a pivotal participant in the EEC, was reluctant to relinquish additional sovereignty. (Macchiarevelli, 2018). The conclusion of the crisis, via the Luxembourg Compromise, confirmed the idea of national veto power over significant decisions, so confirming the intergovernmentalist perspective that states would only integrate on their terms.

Intergovernmentalism offers a valuable perspective for comprehending the gradual advancement of integration in domains such as defence and foreign policy. Notwithstanding economic integration, European nations have hesitated to completely unify their foreign policies or military capacities, opting instead to retain authority over these fundamental elements of sovereignty. Despite attempts to synchronise foreign policy via frameworks such as the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), these endeavours have been constrained and frequently obstructed by discord among member nations. The hesitance of numerous EU member states to embrace a cohesive position on military interventions or diplomatic issues illustrates the intergovernmental perspective that nations prioritise sovereignty in situations of national significance. (Smith,

1996).

The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 exemplifies intergovernmentalism by establishing the European Union (EU) and facilitating the introduction of the euro. The Maastricht Treaty marked a substantial advancement in economic and monetary integration, although it also highlighted the constraints of political unification. The treaty discussions involved rigorous bargaining among national governments, and the final accord embodied a series of compromises aimed at safeguarding state sovereignty in critical domains. (Roger Eatwell, 2018). The United Kingdom secured exemptions from the single currency and certain elements of the social policy chapter, illustrating that governments maintained considerable authority over their participation in the integration process.

### **Liberal Intergovernmentalism: An Evolution of the Theory**

In the 1990s, Andrew Moravcsik built upon Hoffmann's intergovernmentalism by formulating what he called "liberal intergovernmentalism." This revised approach aimed to incorporate the impact of domestic politics and economic concerns on the actions of national governments.

Hoffmann's intergovernmentalism emphasised external negotiations among nations, whereas Moravcsik contended that internal elements, including the interests of economic sectors and political elites, significantly influence a state's integration strategy.

Liberal intergovernmentalism emphasises the primacy of national governments in the integration process while positing that domestic concerns significantly shape the stances states adopt in intergovernmental negotiations. The impetus for economic integration inside the European Union has frequently been propelled by the interests of powerful business sectors poised to gain from a consolidated market. (Taylor, 2008). Consequently, governments negotiate within the EU influenced by these home influences. Moravcsik established the concept of "credible commitments" to elucidate why governments choose to delegate certain authority to supranational agencies. This perspective posits that governments might provide authority to European institutions to secure the advantages of collaboration and guarantee adherence to their obligations throughout time. Nonetheless, these delegations of authority are consistently constrained and meticulously adjusted to safeguard national sovereignty.

### **Critiques of Intergovernmentalism**

Intergovernmentalism has significantly contributed to the understanding of European integration, however, it has also encountered criticism. Neo-functionalists contend that the theory diminishes the significance of supranational institutions in influencing the trajectory of integration. The European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Court of Justice have all

actively contributed to the advancement of integration, frequently beyond the desires of individual member states. The European Court of Justice's decisions regarding the supremacy of EU law and the direct applicability of European legislation within national legal frameworks have profoundly influenced the integration process in ways that intergovernmentalism fails to address (Taylor, 2008). These verdicts have frequently augmented the authority of EU institutions, contesting the notion that integration is exclusively propelled by national governments.

Another objection originates from researchers who contend that intergovernmentalism insufficiently considers the influence of non-state players, including interest groups, civil society, and transnational networks, which have gained prominence in the EU policymaking process. These actors frequently operate inside the parameters of supranational institutions to promote their interests, facilitating the enhancement of integration in manners that transcend mere intergovernmental negotiations. Intergovernmentalism persists as a robust and lasting theory for comprehending European integration. By highlighting the pivotal role of nation-states and the significance of national interests, it elucidates why integration advances in certain domains while stagnating in others (Wellings B. , 2019). Historical instances such as the "empty chair crisis" and the Maastricht Treaty illustrate that intergovernmentalism reveals integration as a non-automatic process, contingent upon strategic decisions undertaken by national governments in reaction to evolving political and economic circumstances.

Nonetheless, as European integration has intensified, the theory has seen challenges from alternative perspectives that highlight the significance of supranational institutions and non-state actors. Liberal intergovernmentalism seeks to mitigate certain objections by integrating domestic politics and economic considerations into its approach. (Windischer, 2019). Ultimately, intergovernmentalism provides a significant understanding of the constraints of European integration and the enduring relevance of the nation-state in influencing Europe's political trajectory.

## **Conclusion**

European integration represents one of the most ambitious and intricate political endeavours of the contemporary period, marked by an ongoing equilibrium between unity and diversity. In recent decades, the development of the European Union (EU) has entailed enhanced collaboration across multiple sectors while honouring the distinct identities, cultures, and political systems of its member states. Theories of European integration aim to elucidate the dynamics of this process, providing critical insights into the forces fostering unity while emphasising the obstacles presented by diversity.



The core of European integration lies in the conflict between the aspiration for unity and the necessity to maintain diversity. The EU was established to transcend the nationalist conflicts that led to two world wars in Europe. Economic interconnectedness, political collaboration, and collective governance are seen as vital for sustaining peace, prosperity, and stability throughout the continent. This concept of togetherness has facilitated the establishment of essential institutions, including the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Court of Justice, which coordinate policies and promote collaboration among member states.

Conversely, Europe's historical and cultural variety has rendered uniform integration unfeasible. National governments are profoundly dedicated to safeguarding national sovereignty, especially in domains like as defence, taxation, and foreign policy. The European Union's challenge has consistently been to promote integration while honouring the uniqueness of its member states. The current discussion between supranational and national authorities reflects Europe's intrinsic variety, and this equilibrium is a hallmark of the integration process.

Integration theories elucidate how the EU has addressed the complexities of unity and diversity. Functionalism and neo-functionalism present hopeful perspectives, positing that cooperation in one sector, such as the economy, can facilitate deeper integration in other domains through a process termed "spillover." These ideas emphasise that technical and economic collaboration can progressively foster political unity, as nations grow increasingly interdependent and supranational institutions assume a more significant role in government. Neofunctionalism particularly underscores the active role of institutions, such as the European Commission, and non-state players, including interest groups and civil society, in advancing the integration process.

Nonetheless, the limitations of this viewpoint become evident when examining the influence of national governments on the rate and extent of integration. Intergovernmentalism, articulated by scholars like Stanley Hoffmann, challenges more integrationist perspectives by stating that nation-states continue to be the principal actors in the European endeavour. This idea posits that governments collaborate when it aligns with their national interests but oppose integration when it jeopardises their sovereignty. The "empty chair crisis" of the 1960s, during which France briefly ceased its involvement in European institutions, together with the United Kingdom's numerous opt-outs from EU policy, illustrates that integration is neither automatic nor inevitable.

Liberal intergovernmentalism, an advancement of this philosophy, posits that domestic political and economic considerations influence a state's inclinations for integration. This view recognises that national governments negotiate inside the EU framework not merely as singular entities, but as representations of diverse domestic actors and interest groups. This elucidates why states may confer certain powers to EU institutions while concurrently safeguarding their sovereignty in

politically sensitive domains. The efficacy of European integration is most apparent in the economic domain. The creation of the European Single Market has resulted in one of the largest and most integrated economic areas globally, facilitating the unrestricted movement of products, services, capital, and individuals. The introduction of the euro in 1999 intensified economic connections among member states, enhancing trade and investment while promoting economic growth.

However, economic integration has also revealed the difficulties of managing diversity inside the EU. The Eurozone crisis of the late 2000s exposed substantial structural disparities between northern and southern European economies. Divergent fiscal strategies and economic outcomes generated tensions that challenged the boundaries of solidarity within the EU. The crisis incited discussions over the necessity of enhanced political integration, including a more centralised fiscal policy, to stabilise the euro, underscoring the conflict between deeper integration and the aspiration to maintain national authority over essential economic issues.

In the domain of politics and governance, European integration has been markedly inconsistent. Although the EU has established a unified foreign and security policy, member states have hesitated to completely integrate their foreign and defence strategies. National governments persist in asserting their sovereignty in different domains, frequently leading to disparate strategies regarding global concerns. The 2015 migrant crisis highlighted these gaps, as countries reacted differently to the surge of refugees, demonstrating a lack of consensus on managing common concerns. British exit from the European Union The United Kingdom's exit from the EU exemplifies the challenges presented by Europe's diversity. The UK's 2016 vote to exit the EU, mostly motivated by apprehensions over national sovereignty and immigration control, illustrates the constraints of integration when it clashes with domestic political circumstances. Brexit underscored that, although the EU has significantly advanced in promoting unity, the diversity of political and cultural identities inside Europe continues to be a formidable force that might impede future integration.

The future of European integration will hinge on the EU's ability to adequately reconcile unity and diversity. The emergence of populist and nationalist movements in several member nations indicates an increasing portion of the populace that perceives a disconnection from the European Union. These movements contend that the EU has grown excessively remote from ordinary populations and overly concentrated on technical government, undermining national identity and sovereignty. The persistent difficulties of globalisation, climate change, and international security highlight the necessity for European nations to collaborate. Challenges such as trade, environmental sustainability, and geopolitical stability exceed the capabilities of individual members, rendering collaboration through the EU increasingly vital. The EU's capacity to respond to these problems, while honouring the varied requirements and preferences of its

member states, will be pivotal in determining its destiny.

In summary, European integration is an extraordinary endeavour in reconciling unity and diversity. Theories of integration, like functionalism, neofunctionalism, and intergovernmentalism, elucidate the dynamics propelling this process while also emphasising its constraints. The ongoing evolution of the EU will perpetuate the tension between enhancing collaboration and safeguarding national sovereignty, which will remain central to the European goal. The success of integration will hinge on the EU's capacity to manage these conflicting dynamics, promoting unity where necessary while honouring the diversity that distinguishes Europe.

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