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The Evolution of European Empire Building *The European Union in the Context of History*

The political face of Europe is changing, as the European Union evolves and expands to encompass nearly the whole of the continent. What sort of entity is the European Union, and how does it fit into the context of history? Specifically, how does it compare to the great European empires of centuries past? This paper will initially conduct a very brief survey of the major European political forces that have projected their influence beyond their own borders. Second, it will examine the origins, development, and current situation of the EU in greater depth, focusing on the situation of several member and candidate countries. Third, it will compare and contrast the strange creature that is the EU with previous empires, examine its strengths and weaknesses, and hazard a glimpse towards the future.

I. European Empires

I.1. Roman Empire

The first power to wield control over the greater part of European territory was the Roman Empire. As a major civilizing force, it brought concepts of law and bureaucratic control to parts of the continent that had known such order. The empire was highly centralized, with all power consolidated in Rome. Provinces were conquered by force and added to the empire, reaching as far as modern-day Scotland. They were protected by Roman legions, and natural resources were returned to Rome. At a time when communication links were primitive, the conquered territories were loosely administered.

No empire's demise is more infamous or inglorious than the fall of the Roman Empire. It expanded to a size that was unmanageable, and whose supply chain was no longer viable. When Rome itself faced barbarian invasions, it was forced to abandon its outermost colonies to consolidate its strength at the core, eventually in vain. All great things must come to an end, and we must keep some questions in mind during this period of European Union expansion: How large is large enough, and how large is too large? Under what circumstances will the EU face its downfall?

1.2 The Age of Empires

From the middle of the second millennium, the major powers of Europe were confined by the physical boundaries of Europe and their close proximity. Aided by the development of navigation, they cast their gaze towards far-flung territories and made a mad dash to divide up the resources of the rest of the world. The Spanish founded colonies in the New World to spread the salvation of Christianity and search for riches of gold and silver. The French saw themselves as a civilizing force, and sought to spread *la gloire de la civilisation française*. The English were more practical, and saw colonial expansion as a profitable enterprise. Even the Portuguese and Dutch tried their hands at becoming colonial powers, with mixed success.

Around the beginning of the nineteenth century, the fortunes of these great empires began to wane. The colonial powers waged war against each other, and faced a wave of independence movements among their colonies. By the end of the century, virtually the whole of the western world had become independent from its European masters.

1.3 The United States

As an offshoot of the British Empire, the story of the formation of the United States is worth mentioning. From the time of independence, the Americans have increased their own sphere of influence so much that it surpassed that of the British in the middle of the twentieth century. America's roots in Puritanism and the struggle with imperialism endowed the country with a certain foundation legend. This led to an enduring sense of manifest destiny, that Americans were there for a purpose and it was their divine right and duty to build a nation from sea to shining sea.

In some ways, the American westward expansion parallels the eastern expansion of the European Union. Of course, the fundamental difference is that the Americans faced little organized resistance in their way. Their civilizing force was essentially unmatched by anything the Native Americans were able to muster. Without discounting the rich cultural heritage of these peoples, they barely stood in the way of Anglo expansion and for all intents might as well not have been there at all as far as the Americans were concerned. American expansion took place as if on a tabula rasa, bounded by Canada, Mexico and the Pacific, and territories and states were established as soon as they could get enough white settlers there to populate them.

In form the United States does not itself constitute an empire, but rather a federation of states. In terms of territorial aspirations beyond the contiguous states, Alaska and Hawaii are exceptional cases and other overseas territories are essentially

the odd scraps of history (Puerto Rico, Guam), and hardly constitute an empire. Rather, the United States exerts its influence politically and economically over the greater part of the capitalist world. In the cold war it played the ideological counterpart to the forces of communism, and as the victor it has more recently tried to assert itself unilaterally as the world's only superpower. Its military might is unchallenged, but economic forces may leave the country unable to afford to project its power and vulnerable to competition from the Chinese juggernaut.

1.4 The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

The eighty-year experiment in Soviet Communism bears special mention. Based on philosophical notions crafted in western Europe by Marx and Engels during the turmoils of 1848, the Soviet Union had its core structure shaped by ideology. And while it was conceived as the antithesis of the Russian Empire, it nonetheless became that empire's successor state, with all of its historical and cultural baggage. The USSR is worth studying both as a fundamental contrast to the mechanisms of the European Union, and because its legacy still plays an important role in the EU today, in particular as it defines the maximum extent of eastern expansion.

Revolution! The chaotic beginnings of the Soviet Union lie in "a spectre [that was] haunting Europe." In this sense Europe is a term that generally doesn't include Russia, and as such Communism is a force that came from without. The Communist Manifesto was initially published in six languages, none of them Russian. Like disenfranchised workers in Europe, the Russian masses were feeling the brunt of economic and political repression (even if most of them weren't educated enough to know it). After a failed uprising in 1905, it took not one but two revolutions in 1917: one to depose the Tsar, and another to establish the base of Soviet power.

What was the nature of Soviet expansion? The Russians pulled out of World War I, casting it as an irrelevant war of imperialist aggression in which they wanted to play no part. Theoretically, one Communist revolution would lead to another as countries threw off their imperialist shackles, and the liberated proletariat would band together across former nationalist boundaries, to form one workers paradise. The Soviets anxiously awaited their world revolution for many years, but eventually were forced to abandon these ambitions and turn their attention inward to consolidate power at home.

After contesting a civil war between the Bolshevik and Menshevik Communist factions, the Russians banded together with their Slavic neighbors in Ukraine and Belarus to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1922. In one of many ways that the Soviet Union professed one ideology but in fact did something entirely different, all people were considered equal under the philosophy of Communism yet power was consolidated absolutely in Moscow. As such, the USSR essentially became

the Russian Empire with a different name and religion, and just as little changed after the fall of Communism.

The territory that the USSR inherited from the Russian Empire was already enormous, extending through the vast emptiness of Siberia to the Pacific Ocean. Russia is essentially a medium-sized country on the edge of Europe that happens to encompass an enormous frozen chunk of Asia, and as such that expansion is of little interest. The Soviet Union expanded in the years after its founding by “liberating” its adjacent neighbors, which was basically a code for conquering them. In practice, the USSR actually derived little benefit from its lesser republics (they were all less than the Russian SFSR) other than as a demonstration of the success of the Communist struggle. The USSR ultimately took the form of a contiguous bloc of mostly inconsequential republics.

After World War II, the Soviet Union expanded its sphere of influence to include most of Eastern Europe. After fighting a long and bitter frontal war, they had the opportunity to fill a power void left by the collapse of Nazi Germany. They spread their ideology in the wake of the Red Army, and one Communist revolution after another occurred across the former battle zone. Unlike the predicted mass uprising of workers, which was supposed to come from below, these revolutions were essentially orchestrated by the Soviets and plastered over by their massive propaganda mill. The nations that eventually formed the Warsaw Pact constituted a buffer zone between Western Europe and the USSR proper. It is the loss of this buffer zone (not to mention the former Baltic republics) that causes the Russian Federation so much anxiety in the present day.

Contrary to the British Empire, which conducted its overseas enterprises only to the extent that they were profitable, the experiments in Soviet colonization and proxy wars could be described as an empire on its head. Resources flowed towards the colonies, rather than back from them. It was a demonstration of ideological might, one that gave the Americans great cause to worry during the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. But with a collapsing economic infrastructure and a decaying bureaucracy at home, the USSR could hardly afford such charades. The occupation of Afghanistan proved to be the last straw, as the Soviets poured resources into subjugating what the Americans are currently discovering to be an ungovernable country. Financially and ideologically bankrupt, the Soviet Union crumbled before the world’s eyes in 1991 and vanished.

1.5. Nazi Germany and World War II

Rewinding a few decades, the saga of Nazi Germany plays a fundamental role in the origin story of the European Union. Hitler styled his empire as the Third Reich, placing it into the context of history as the successor state to the Holy Roman Empire and the German Empire. Using racial superiority as a rallying call, he asserted the Germans' right to conquer Europe, with aspirations towards the world. But this empire is unique in that its territorial expansion only occurred during the course of a broader war, and in a relatively short period of time between the annexation of the Sudetenland in 1938 through the *Untergang* in 1945. There was little time to establish political trends, as the rise and fall of the empire followed the course of warfare on the eastern and western fronts until its demise.

2. The European Union

2.1 Origins

As Europe recovered itself from the ashes of war in the 1950s, there were beginnings of rapprochement and forgiveness. There was a prevailing sentiment, especially between the perpetual antagonists of Germany and France, that such a thing must never happen again. The European Coal and Steel Union, proposed in 1950 and consisting of France, West Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries, unified coal and steel production across the member states. War depends heavily upon these resources, and without control over their production it would hinder any single country's ability to wage war. It was planned that this union would form a basis for future European integration, and it is from these humble beginnings that the European Union has evolved.

With the success of the European Coal and Steel Union, it was decided to unify more industries and bring more parts of the economy under unified control. The scope of the union was broadened to encompass more aspects of the economy, and the 1957 Treaty of Rome established the European Economic Community. This is the date that is now historically recognized as the founding of what has evolved into the EU. The European Union was formally created in 1993 by the Maastricht Treaty, with the European Community as one of its three pillars (the others being foreign policy and judicial cooperation). Over time, the responsibility for more legal and policy areas has shifted from the national to the union level, governing such areas as customs, visas, immigration, agriculture, healthcare, consumer protection, energy, the environment, human rights, peacekeeping, and justice.

2.2 Expansion

The expansion of the European Union is an intricate and bureaucratic process. Incorporating new member states into the European Union involves harmonizing a country's laws with the existing laws of the union. These laws, also known as the *acquis communautaire*, are grouped into 31 "chapters" that essentially form a checklist for membership. Countries must meet a variety of economic benchmarks, with their foreign debt, interest rates and inflation within certain metrics. Among other things, they must conform to certain agricultural and environmental practices, and guarantee the rights of linguistic minorities. The process is lengthy, taking approximately a decade, and begins with an association agreement, followed by official candidacy, and finally membership. Candidacy is also subject to the unanimous approval of the existing members.

Membership in the European Union has expanded in several waves. In addition to the founding group of six, these included the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Denmark (1973); Greece (1981); Spain and Portugal (1986); and Sweden, Finland and Austria (1995). East Germany became the first and only country to join the union by merging with a member state, in 1990. Together these fifteen nations comprised the core of the union for nearly a decade.

A little over a decade after the fall of Communism across Eastern Europe, the European Union incorporated most of the Warsaw Pact countries in the union's largest single round of expansion. 2004 brought the incorporation of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary; the former Yugoslav republic of Slovenia; the three former Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; and the Mediterranean islands of Malta and Cyprus. Finally, the 2007 addition of Romania and Bulgaria formed the 27-member union that exists today.

The former Yugoslav republics of Croatia and Macedonia are official candidate countries, and are likely to join in the near future. Turkey has been a candidate country for some time, but its destiny is currently in doubt as many states are opposed to its membership. The Balkan nations of Albania, Montenegro and Serbia have officially applied to join, as has the economically imperiled Iceland. Patching the remaining holes in the Balkan region, Bosnia and Kosovo have signed stabilization accords in preparation for application.

There are two collections of countries that encompass most, but not all, members of the European Union as well as some other countries. The first is the common economic union, whose financial policies and interest rates are set by the European Central Bank and whose common currency is the euro. Notable omissions from the EU-15 include the United Kingdom, Denmark and Sweden, who have negotiated opt-outs. New member states are obliged to join, however so far only Slovenia, Slovakia, Malta and Cyprus have met the necessary economic benchmarks,

which are stricter than those necessary for membership in the union. The microstates of Monaco, San Marino and the Vatican City officially use the euro but do not participate in setting monetary policy, while Montenegro and Kosovo use the euro unilaterally.

Another important collection is the Schengen Area, a zone of free travel without internal border controls. Schengen space consists of the members of the European Union, with the notable exception of the United Kingdom and Ireland, who have their own, separate customs union. Norway and Iceland are also members, having previously held a travel union with the other Nordic countries. Even perpetually neutral Switzerland has found it expedient to join Schengen, with Liechtenstein soon to follow. The ten countries who joined the union in 2004 became part of Schengen space in 2007, except for Cyprus, and Romania and Bulgaria are expected to follow as well.

Further, there are two organizations whose memberships largely mirror those of the European Union, but include other nations as well. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a union of common military defense, and exists as a complement to the EU, which currently lacks any unified form of military command. Reaching across the Atlantic Ocean, it includes the United States and Canada, as well as Turkey. The other organization is the European Economic Area, which created a broader area of free trade and includes Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. As Switzerland is part of Schengen but not the EEA, it maintains border controls for customs but not visa purposes.

2.3 Members

Before proceeding on to analyze the peculiarities of some individual member and candidate countries, let us keep in mind one informal metric: the flagpole factor. How much does each country identify with membership in the European Union, and how do they balance issues of nationalism with union pride? The answer can be visually determined by the way in which countries fly their own banner next to the twelve stars of the EU flag. (Note that the twelve stars do not represent a given number of constituent entities, as on the flag of the United States, but rather express a sense of union and completeness.) For example, France staunchly supports the EU while remaining proud of its own traditions, and flies the two flags at equal height. The English can scarcely tolerate membership in the United Kingdom, much less the European Union, whose flag is never to be seen. On the other hand, Luxembourg evidently feels more comfortable in the context of the greater union, and displays the EU flag on license plates without any mention of the country! Even as a candidate country, Romania displayed its enthusiasm by flying Romanian and EU flags from every lamppost.

2.3.1 United Kingdom

Still suffering from the loss of its empire, the British are wary of anything that would seem to diminish their autonomy. In some ways it's a miracle that the United Kingdom is a part of the European Union. Certainly, many Britons do not identify as being part of Europe; when they say that they're going to Europe they mean across the Channel. In fact, the English still regard Scotland a separate country, even through the outside world sees the U.K. as a single entity. In terms of the flagpole factor, government entities fly the Union Jack alone, while private citizens will fly (and football fans paint their faces with) the English cross of St. George.

In several concrete ways, Britain enjoys several opt-outs and exemptions that differentiate it from the rest of Europe. Naturally the British Isles continue to drive on the left. Road distances are measured in miles, and beer is served in pints. Even to the extent that commercial activity must use the metric system, a quart of milk is sold in a package labeled 1.136 litres.

Fortress England, surrounded by water, exists outside of Schengen space. The British are xenophobic and suspicious of terrorist threats, and wouldn't trust the Lithuanian border with Belarus as the only frontier between London and the rest of the world. When flying through British airports, passengers must endure another round of through screening to bring them up to their own security standards, thank you very much.

The United Kingdom also retains the right to use the pound sterling as its currency in place of the euro. It makes the point that its economy is separate from that of the continent, with its own periods of boom and bust. Most importantly this allows the Bank of England to set its own interest rates, which at times have diverged significantly from those of the European Central Bank. The pound has also fluctuated independently against other world currencies, creating an economy whose cost of living and market prices have at times risen sharply higher those in the rest of Europe.

Britain's euroskepticism was countered for a time by the pro-integration prime minister Tony Blair. He was an enthusiastic core figure at European summits, a yearned for a time when Britain would adopt the euro. An internal Labour power struggle replaced Blair with the pro-Europe but uncharismatic Gordon Brown, who has the disposition of an accountant rather than that of a popular leader. Current financial troubles will likely force Labour from power, to be replaced by David Cameron's Conservative party. One of Cameron's main planks is distancing England from Europe. It is fortuitous that Europe sorted out the Lisbon Treaty in advance of the Tory takeover, because they were committed to putting the treaty to a popular vote that would have certainly lead to a negative result. If there were a gambling contest to guess which country would be the first to leave the European Union, the

smart money would be on England (Scotland gets to go free too).

2.3.2 Nordic Countries

The five Nordic Countries generally overlap the region of Scandinavia, and consist of Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Iceland. These countries have at times had common governments and have had their own accords governing free travel and immigration, predating their memberships in the European Union and Schengen space.

However, no two of these five countries have a common situation in the European Union. All five are part of the EEA and Schengen space. Finland is the only one of the five that is part of the euro zone, and also the only one that does not speak an Indo-European language. Denmark has negotiated an opt-out from the euro zone, while Sweden is obliged to adopt the euro pending bureaucratic certifications that are indefinitely stalled. Norway and Iceland are not even part of the European Union at all, remaining outside for precisely one reason: fishing rights. The majority of their economies depend upon fishing, and they do not want fishing boats from other member states poaching their territorial waters.

As part of the EEA, Norway and Iceland are subject to EU laws governing agriculture and trade, as the majority of their foreign trade happens with EU countries. However they have no representation in the European parliament and hence no control over these laws. While it may seem that they get the short end of the stick, they would be welcome to join the union at the cost of their territorial exclusivity: the EU would be unlikely to grant them exemptions with regard to fishing rights.

The Icelandic financial crisis of 2008-2009 brought new attention to the matter of Icelandic ascension. The Icelandic banking system operated wildly outside the parameters set by the European Central Bank, with interest rates as high as 15%. When three of the country's four banks collapsed, foreigners staged a run on the banks, the currency disintegrated, and companies listed on the stock market lost most of their market capitalization.

With its economy in tatters, Iceland faces the prospect of fast-tracked European integration. The krónur is now nearly worthless, raising the question of an emergency adoption of the euro. On the one hand if they had used the euro previously none of this would have happened, because interest rates would have been outside their control and the economy of the 400,000-strong island would have just been a blip on the European radar screen. On the other hand, integrating the euro now would mean pegging the krónur to the euro at 30% of its former value, putting Icelanders at a permanent disadvantage, in sharp contrast to their former top-ranked standard of living.

No countries outside of the EU other than microstates officially use the euro, so euro adoption would need to come as a result of formal ascension to the union. While Iceland could have easily joined before if they had forsaken their exclusive fishing domain, now their economic metrics would pose a significant obstacle. It remains to be seen whether the EU will be willing to bend its ascension requirements to aid its ailing Nordic neighbor. Now that the collapsed banks have been nationalized, the government has incurred massive foreign debt to the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, whose deposit insurance funds bailed out their own citizens with Icelandic bank accounts. Reconciling this foreign obligation poses a massive hurdle towards the assent of the UK and the Netherlands. Iceland has formally applied, and may join the union as soon as 2012.

2.3.3 Eastern Europe

For the duration of the Cold War, the Iron Curtain separated capitalist countries of the west, generally members of NATO and later the European Union, from the communist countries of the east, members of the Warsaw Pact or the Soviet Union itself. Russia maintained a buffer zone, consisting of the Warsaw Pact and the Baltic republics, to separate it from the west. The countries of central Europe, such as East Germany and the Czech Republic, were generally more western-looking and had relatively moderate governments. Those two nations, for example, were industrialized before the imposition of Communism, had a collective memory of life beforehand, and were therefore the first to cast it aside.

When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, the credibility of the East German government dissolved overnight. As the formerly separated populations mingled, everyone was speaking of reunification. Just a year later, The German Democratic Republic merged with the Federal Republic of Germany, and as mentioned above became the first and only country to join the union by merging with an existing member. The country quickly moved the majority of its government institutions to Berlin, and set about redeveloping the new capital to remove all traces of the former division. Twenty years later the very conception of East and West Germany remains merely a memory to some, but truly balancing the economic situation in the different regions of the country proves to be a more long-lasting challenge.

As the Soviet Union dissolved and communist regimes throughout eastern Europe fell like dominoes, old ways were cast aside and new democratic, western-looking governments were set up in their place. The European Union was ideally situated to fill this power vacuum, and provided assistance to the new governments. Stabilization accords were signed, and for a decade and a half these countries worked to create new democratic, capitalist institutions with the goal of harmonization with EU laws. In 2004 the union's largest expansion ever relocated the border between

east and west from its former location along the Iron Curtain to the borders of the former Soviet Union, slicing off the Baltic countries in the process.

These developments are a frightening reminder to the Russian Federation of its waning influence. Nobody asked the Russians for their permission, or even consulted with them about this rewriting of the rules of eastern Europe. While the western powers have moved on from the Cold War to other challenges, particularly sorting out their relationship with the Muslim world, the Russians seem trapped in their former mindset. As the United States negotiates to install elements of its missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic, so as to defend itself and its allies from the Iranian threat, the Russians are convinced that these defenses weaken their military superiority. It's embarrassing they they are practically playing these war games by themselves.

2.3.4 Former Yugoslavia

The Balkans have been the crossroads of Europe for centuries, with the Slavic peoples intermingling with Macedonians and Turks, and Orthodox, Catholics, and Muslims competing for religious dominance. In the nineteenth century, the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires were at ends in the region, and World War I was sparked on a street corner in Sarajevo at the beginning of the twentieth century.

From the ashes of World War I came the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the first effort to unify the Yugoslav peoples. Renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia shortly thereafter, it also encompassed present day Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Kosovo. The area was occupied by the Nazis in World War II, and upon liberation was reformed into the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, with six member states (Kosovo and Vojvodina being autonomous provinces within Serbia).

Led by the strong hand of the charismatic Josip Broz Tito, the union encouraged Yugoslav nationalism rather than ethnic and religious affiliations. Yugoslavia was the only socialist nation in Europe to remain outside the Warsaw Pact throughout the Cold War. Tito maintained good relationships with both the western powers and the Soviet Union, and along with Egypt and India, Yugoslavia was a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement.

After Tito's death in 1980 Yugoslavia's fortunes declined. Without his strong unifying influence, ethnic tensions and old rivalries began to rise. When socialist governments across eastern Europe began to fall at the beginning of the 1990s, Yugoslav unity began to disintegrate. Unlike the cohesive countries of the Warsaw Pact, Yugoslavia successively broke into pieces. Each of the six (seven with Kosovo) republics has its own story to tell, some more gruesomely bloody than others.

Slovenia was always the odd man out in Yugoslavia, as the most prosperous and the most western-looking. Influenced by Venetian and Austrian civilization, the country is quite prosperous and has little to do with its eastern neighbors besides its Slavic language (the least similar to the others). Slovenia was the first republic to declare independence from Yugoslavia, in 1991, and after a minor skirmish escaped the trauma of the Balkan wars. Slovenia is the only Yugoslav country to have joined the EU, and was the first formerly communist country to adopt the euro. (I was there on that day!)

Croatia was the second country to secede from Yugoslavia, and fought a four-year war of independence. That war, along with the nationalist regime of Franjo Tudman, stunted Croatia's development and westernization, and prevented the country from joining the EU at the same time as Slovenia. The country has become more progressive, and benefits from a healthy tourist industry along its pristine Adriatic coastline (a benefit that Bosnia does not share). Despite a recent border squabble with Slovenia, Croatia's application is proceeding and the country may join as soon as 2011 or 2012, preferably at the same time as Iceland.

Macedonia also escaped the brunt of the Balkan conflicts after its declaration of independence in 1991. Along with Croatia it is an official candidate, but no official date for joining the union has been set. One of the largest obstacles is a naming dispute with neighboring Greece, which claims the name Macedonia belongs to one of its provinces and insists upon the unwieldy phrase Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).

Bosnia is a country torn apart by ethnic conflict. While Tito managed to subdue nationalism during his administration, after the fall of the communist state Bosnia was just torn to pieces. Serbs living in Bosnia felt repressed, and fought for their own territory inside the Bosnian republic. Lingering resentments raged between Serbs, Bosnians and Croats, as well as between Orthodox, Muslims and Catholics (not always divided proportionally). Independence led to a four year war, with accusations of genocide that will be keeping the war crimes tribunal in The Hague busy indefinitely. The US-brokered peace process left the country divided into two separate Bosnian and Serb entities. The fractured, decentralized structure has left the country unable to speak with one voice or proceed with one purpose, such as EU ascension. The country is a potential candidate, but its future membership is uncertain as it has not arrived at a stable situation.

Serbia has always been the strongest and most powerful member state of Yugoslavia, remaining at the core even as the other countries crumbled around it. It is important to remember the difference between the Bosnian Serbs and Serbia proper, for Serbia's role in the Bosnian conflict was mostly inspirational and financial, for the country did not actively wage war in Bosnia itself. UN sanctions crippled the country's economy, and American cruise missiles destroyed several key

government ministries. Serbia has made significant progress in turning towards the European Union in the past decade. As of the end of 2009, its citizens no longer need visas to travel into Schengen space, and the country has applied to join the union.

Once four of the six Yugoslav republics had declared independence, Yugoslavia became a federation of only two countries. For a short spell it renamed itself Serbia and Montenegro, but sure enough even Montenegro wanted out of the party in 2006. Thus all traces of union were dissolved, and Yugoslavia was whittled down to the Republic of Serbia. When Montenegro was still attached to Serbia it unilaterally used the German mark in preference to the Yugoslav dinar, so when the mark gave way to the euro Montenegro unilaterally adopted the union's currency. The country applied for membership in 2008.

Kosovo enjoyed significant autonomy under Yugoslavia, but relations between ethnic Albanians and Serbs soured and led to a bloody conflict in 1999. Since the end of that war Kosovo has been a special protectorate of the United Nations. Kosovo declared independence in 2008, with 65 countries granting diplomatic recognition to the Republic of Kosovo. As the European Union does not have a unified foreign policy it does not have a common position on the republic. Some countries such as Russia and Spain do not want to set a precedent for supporting regional independence movements, lest their own breakaway regions would use Kosovo as an example. EU members Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain continue to withhold recognition.

2.3.5 Turkey

The potential for Turkish membership in the European Union remains a difficult question, full of contradictions. Geographically, Turkey's largest city straddles the border between Europe and Asia, but the bulk of the country lies in Asia Minor, squarely outside of Europe. It is an overwhelmingly Muslim country, albeit one with predominantly secular leanings. It has joined nearly every international organization that it is eligible to join, such as NATO, the OECD, and the OSCE and has been an official EU candidate since 1999, yet whether its ascension bit will ever be successful is currently unknown.

Europeans are frightened of a Turkish presence in Europe, and Islamization in particular, yet western European countries like Germany and the Netherlands already have sizable Turkish minorities. Just as Mexican immigrants in the United States typically come from poorer, rural backgrounds, most Turkish immigrants come from eastern Turkey and Kurdistan, and many are seeking freedom to practice Islam that they do not enjoy in secular Turkey. While some Europeans are scared of Turkish immigration if the country joins the EU, ironically along with membership practicing Muslims would no longer need to leave the country to enjoy religious

freedoms that are mandated under EU law.

2.4 A Constitution for Europe

The European Union's effectiveness and cohesion have been compromised by its evolutionary development and its rapid growth. At first, it was possible to govern by consensus: there were only six member states, and the scope of laws covered by the union was limited. With the expansion to 27 countries, each one wielding veto authority, and the broadening of EU jurisdictions the union was becoming ungovernable. Further, the union lacked any effective, visible, persistent leadership. The rotating presidency, in which the leader of a member state manned the helm for six months, did not give any one leader the time or authority to govern effectively. This revolving door leadership was merely an honorary institution.

This begged the question of whether it was time to evolve the union into something more than a loose gathering, into an entity that bore traits of a country itself: a president, a mechanism for passing laws by popular vote, and a unified foreign policy. The EU leaders agreed in 2004 that it was time for a European Constitution that would replace previous organizing treaties and create the aforementioned institutions. A lengthy document was crafted, one that began by enshrining the universal rights of man, and hence Europeans.

In order to withdraw the system of universal veto powers, consensus had to be achieved one last time. Each member state had to approve the new constitution, although the approval mechanism was different for each state: some had parliamentary votes, while others had public referendums. This was all supposed to be a rubber stamp procedure, but the constitution was dealt a shocking blow when the French rejected the constitution in a referendum in 2005. The French love their country but hate their government, and will vote *non* on virtually anything regardless of the question. Some blame Chirac for arrogantly putting the measure before the people without assurances that it would pass, when the French parliament could have approved it instead. When a Dutch referendum rejected the constitution as well, planners were forced to rethink their strategy.

European leaders went back to the drawing board. The Treaty of Lisbon, signed by the member states in 2007, was a dramatically stripped-down version of the constitution. Unlike the constitution, it further amended previous treaties rather than replacing them. It did, however, include the most important changes from the constitution: qualified majority voting, a European president and foreign minister (not the actual titles but effectively such), and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

European leaders learned from their mistakes in earlier attempts to pass a constitution. This time most governments approved the treaty by parliamentary process. However, the approval process was frustrated again in 2008 when Irish

voters voted against the treaty. Ireland was the only country whose constitution required approval by referendum, and so European leaders were stumped again. It was simply inconceivable that four million people on a little island could kill the treaty, so leaders decided to give it another try. After a campaign to boost support for the Lisbon treaty, the government asked the people, “You voted no. Perhaps what you meant to say was, yes?” In 2009 the Irish voters finally approved the treaty. Then there were further squabbles with the Polish and Czech leadership, who wanted to assert their authority and were squeamish about relinquishing control. The larger countries in the union bullied them into submission, effectively saying, “how dare you join the union in 2004, and then attempt to subvert it in 2009?” Days after the Poles and Czechs relented, the Treaty of Lisbon entered force.

3. The EU in Context

What makes the European Union similar to past empires, and what makes it different? Certainly it is an amalgamation of widespread territories, a conglomeration of constituent nation states. At face value, it is a union of 400 million people covering nearly an entire continent, and is the largest economic zone in the world by GDP. Yet due to its lack of cohesion and blurred focus, it fails to speak with one voice and does not constitute a superpower akin to the United States or the former Soviet Union.

The fundamental difference between the European Union and all previous empires is its relation to warfare. Virtually all previous empires were built by conquering territory. Wars were waged to develop empires, and empires were developed to increase the capability of waging war. The ability to wage war was both the symbolic means by which empires demonstrated their power in theory (for example, parades of missiles through Red Square), and the mechanism by which they exercised it in practice.

The European Union’s singular original purpose, on the other hand, was to prevent war. It accomplishes this not just by addressing the symptoms of war, in the manner of United Nations peacekeeping troops, but by restructuring the relationships between countries that cause wars and eliminating the practical means of executing wars between countries on the European continent.

3.1 Sovereignty

One of the unique features of the European Union is its multi-layered organizational structure. As a consequence of the union’s gradual evolution from its humble beginnings, the union is a supranational organization that exists at a higher level than that of a country. Yet unlike other organizations in which its members

participate, such as NATO or the United Nations, the EU is the singular overriding governing entity for its member states. It rests atop of an organizational hierarchy consisting of union, national, provincial, and local governments, with various legal powers distributed among the layers of that organization. Joining the EU is a process that involves ceding control of powers once held at the national level.

Entities such as the United Kingdom and the former Soviet Union consist of constituent countries or republics for their own organizational purposes, but exist as a single country for external purposes. These internal divisions appear on national maps, but not on world maps where the UK and the USSR would be shown in a single color. Of course, both countries had a single seat in the United Nations (and on the Security Council as well). The English genuinely regard Scotland as “a country,” while this is not true off the island. The Soviets saw the USSR as a step toward their dream of unifying all former countries into a single communist paradise, while in practice they were simply building a larger country. Both of these so-called unions focused most power on a single member, and could be thought of as greater England and greater Russia, with these entities frequently representing the whole.

The European Union, while it has taken on many aspects of a country, still concedes national sovereignty to its member states. Each country continues to be a member of the United Nations, while the EU maintains observer status. The EU also enjoys membership in the G8 as a pseudo-country, and while four EU countries are also members it is not counted as one of the “eight.” On the other hand the EU is counted as a proper member of the G20, despite the fact that the same four countries effectively receive double representation. People cannot be citizens of the European Union exclusively and it does not issue passports, but every EU passport displays the name of the European Union above the name of the country. In short, comparing the EU raises more questions than it answers.

Unlike previous empires, the European Union is decentralized. While some members are larger than others, have more representation in the European parliament and wield more soft power, there is no single entity at the core, no Rome, London, Paris, Berlin or Moscow. The capital could never have been placed in one of these cities (obviously not Moscow) because it would have skewed the balance of power. Therefore Brussels was chosen, convenient to the heart of Europe and the other major European capitals yet the capital of a country without grand aspirations that can barely hold itself together.

Culturally, does joining the European Union make a nation less of a country? This is often the fear of candidate countries and fuel for those opposing integration. However EU laws do nothing to regulate or homogenize the national aspects of a country. If anything, the EU champions the cause of protecting the cultural heritage of each member state.

For example, the European Union guarantees the linguistic rights of

minorities. If a group constitutes a significant percentage of the population of a member country, then members of that group deserve to be educated in their own language as well as to have access to government services. These guarantees benefit the Roma communities in southern Europe, and the sizable Russian minority remaining in the Baltics. This is in sharp contrast to the French, who saw spreading *français* as part of their mission, or the Soviets who imposed the use of Russian and modified other languages to use the Cyrillic alphabet. EU membership would particularly benefit the Kurds of eastern Turkey. The EU has even had to intervene to protect the rights of French speakers in the Flemish suburbs of Brussels!

3.2 Manifest Destiny

What factors motivate European Union expansion? Is the union trying to expand to incorporate other countries, or are those countries attempting to join the union? Certainly, previous empires were built by force. As mentioned above, the United States settled previously ungoverned territory while motivated by a sense of manifest destiny. As the Red Army rolled into neighboring territories, the Soviets claimed they were answering the requests of subjugated workers to protect them from imperialist subjugation (which was of course a farce). In Europe, there appears to be an invisible hand pushing the union towards expansion which creates an economic climate that gives neighboring countries little choice but to join.

Those who believe in the fundamental concept of the European Union see it as an entity whose natural state encompasses precisely the territory of the Europe continent, and as such it has its own form of manifest destiny. Although there will probably always be a little Swiss (cheese) hole in the middle, the EU is expanding toward its goal state like gas particles in a chamber. Eastward expansion made enormous progress in 2004 and 2007, and encompassing the rest of the Balkans seems like a matter of time in the current decade. Further, the question of Turkey has forced many to assert that EU expansion should stop at the natural borders of Europe.

As mentioned above, the major difference is that the EU is attempting to include a variety of countries that already very much exist and have their own histories stretching back hundreds of years. These countries are at the same time pressured to join the union, and eager to do so for a variety of reasons. In order to reap the economic benefits of membership, some countries are forced to alter their cherished traditions to conform to the *acquis communautaire*. For example, conservative Malta was forced to decriminalize homosexuality. When they tried to negotiate this point, the EU basically informed them, “get back to us when you’ve repealed that law.”

3.3 Progressive Governance

Because the European Union is such a new phenomenon, it has the advantage of being free from the weight of cultural baggage. It has been free to create new forms of rational, progressive, modern government. Part of the way it has done this is by keeping the fundamental machinations of government out of the spotlight. This doesn't mean that they are secret: while anyone can read about them in excruciating detail on the europa.eu website, most of the work that the EU is doing is not of interest to the average citizen. European Union politics is not personality or issue driven, and this means that it can proceed with progressive, effective government free from the burdens of politics in the negative sense of the word.

As a contrast, whether or not its citizens are conscious of the problem, the United States suffers from anachronistic institutions and a rigidity that makes progressive government an oxymoron. The American legend stemming from its Puritan origins gives the institutions as developed in the 18th century a certain secular holiness. Americans are about as likely to reform them as the Jews are likely to revise the Torah.

For example, the remarkably byzantine Electoral College system was developed at time when communication links were difficult, but any effort to reform that system, even after the recent demonstration of its unsuitability, would gain no traction whatsoever. In Europe meanwhile, there is now an election system where EU citizens can vote in local and provincial elections in their country of residence, even if they are far from their native country. Citizens vote for one of several parties that are active in their own country, which then form coalitions in the European parliament. Elections are therefore not personality-driven, graciously sparing Europe the insanity of the American presidential election process.

While guns are essentially unavailable in Europe, Americans go on shooting each other because the right to bear arms is enshrined in the constitution, never mind that the purpose of the Second Amendment was to allow the citizenry to resist invasions by the British. At the union level, Europeans are not burdened by holding onto anachronistic laws that continue to exist only because of their longevity.

Imagine trying to coax Americans to give up the penny? How could they suffer the affront to the legacy of Lincoln, never mind alter the balance of Democrats and Republicans on the coinage? By contrast, Finland and the Netherlands employ rounding and no longer circulate the one and two eurocent coins. In fact, there aren't any people or real places on the euro currency to ensure fair representation.

European citizens are fundamentally dispassionate about such things and tend to delegate the nuts and bolts details to the Eurocrats to sort out. In essence, this allows politicians who are well informed to work together towards continuous evolution and genuine progress without vocal opposition.

3.4 Criticism

Some criticize the European Union for its opaque political processes, and believe that the real decisions are made in smoky, dimly-lit back rooms. (It's more likely that they are made in smoke-free, florescent-lit back rooms.) For all the byzantine processes that supposedly involve consensus, or more recently a qualified majority, many accuse the French and Germans of jointly leading the show when it comes to important decisions, either through the use of soft power or outright strong-arm tactics.

Efforts to secure the passage of the constitution also raised some eyebrows. The initial approval process was supposed to be a rubber stamp procedure, and European leaders were stumped when they met with resistance on the part of the electorate. And while they did rewrite and streamline the constitution when creating the Treaty of Lisbon, they didn't take as many chances with referendums the second time around. But with the Irish rejection, they were still forced to keep asking until they got the answer they wanted. The constitutional process was wrenching, but hopefully there will be fewer issues with veto threats going forward under the new voting procedures. The Lisbon Treaty does represent the will of the people, in a somewhat abstract and indirect way, to the extent that anybody actually knows what's in it.

Once everyone had signed off on the Lisbon Treaty, the EU wasted no time in appointing a president and foreign minister (technically, the unwieldy titles are the President of the European Council and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy). Note that they were appointed, and while the EU is a democracy these officials are not chosen by means of a popularity contest. The president and foreign minister, who is also one of several vice presidents, were chosen by the European Council, which in turn is formed by the heads of state of the member countries. It was decided in advance to have one continental and one English appointment, to better represent Europe on the world stage. Tony Blair was initially tapped for his popularity, but was deemed too polarizing. In the end the prime minister of Belgium and experienced eurocrat Herman Van Rompuy was appointed president. The only politician who could make the Flemish and the French work together, he was considered an excellent consensus builder, and as an added bonus he already lived in Brussels. Leader of the British House of Lords Baroness Catherine Ashton was appointed foreign secretary.

The methods in which the president and foreign secretary were appointed are certainly subject to criticism. While the American presidential election process is a bit of a circus, the media and the electorate are able to thoroughly vet the candidates during the two year process. The European president was chosen during one or two back room deals, in an entirely opaque process. And while the American election is a

spectacle for the whole world to see, the average European citizen on the street would probably be challenged to name the European president (not just because of the difficult Flemish spelling), if they even know that such an office exists.

There is also criticism of the European Union's financial policies. The expansion of the euro zone is proceeding along with the expansion of the EU, although a few years behind, and all new members are obliged to eventually adopt the euro. For the same reasons that the Bank of England has insisted on remaining outside the common economic area, many have questioned the sense of imposing one economic zone, including a common currency, exchange rates, and interest rates, on such a vast area that in reality consists of many smaller economic units. The mere fact that member states have their own periods of growth and recession demonstrates that the real situation doesn't fit the ideal. Some of the more disorganized countries in southern Europe, notably Italy but also Spain, Portugal and Greece, would typically devalue their currency any time they were faced with budget shortfalls. This lackadaisical financial policy worked as a stopgap measure and led to Italian lira notes with a plethora of zeroes, but is no longer possible with a common currency.

The current Greek financial crisis has presented the European Central Bank with its greatest test of the euro zone philosophy. The Greek government was essentially cooking the books when it came to the national budget, and was investing in disreputable Wall Street investment products to supposedly balance their budgets while postponing their problems. That time to face these problems has come, and suddenly other countries are confronted with the situation of participating in a financial union with a partner that does not respect their shared sense of honesty and accountability. In a demonstration of where the real power lies, Germany and France have stepped in and asserted that they will be running Greek finances until things get back on track, and the Greek government has little say in the matter.

The problem is not even limited to Greece: founding member Italy is rife with corruption, and trouble is brewing in Spain and Portugal as well. Even financial bulwark the United Kingdom is facing spiraling deficits, and it's possible that in the near future they may wish they'd joined the euro zone too if they face a situation similar to Iceland's. The ECB will face continuing challenges as Europe struggles to recover from the current recession, both as a unified whole and one country at a time.

3.5 Future

We've examined not only the rise but also the fall of various empires. The European Union is currently in a phase of expansion, building up towards its ideals. What challenges face the union, and will the integrity of the political, financial, and travel unions persevere? As speculated above, the United Kingdom consistently feels like the odd man out and is leaning towards a government dominated by euroskepticism. The Greek financial crisis is testing the cohesion of the financial union, and it may just be the tip of the iceberg. A major terrorist attack from abroad could test the spirit of openness that led to Schengen space, and cause member states to rethink these freedoms. Most of all, can the EU continue to expand at its current pace, and will the end result, spanning the continent, be sustainable? These are all challenges that are being addressed, and the EU is well positioned for the future.

As the EU moves toward putting the last puzzle pieces into place, it is possible that the Balkan conflict of the 1990s may become the last war on European soil for the foreseeable future. If this prophecy comes true, it would genuinely fulfill the original purpose of the union. Thinking back only half a century to a time of pan-European warfare, this endgame would be beyond the wildest dreams of the founders of the European Coal and Steel Union.