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Table of Contents

LAWINTER REVIEW - Volume 17– nº 01 – 2026

Special edition - Guest Editors of the Current Issue

Professors Daniel Freire e Almeida and Verônica Scriptore

*La densification procédurale de la due diligence climatique:
vers un contrôle juridictionnel de la mise en œuvre des
obligations climatiques internationales*

ADRIANA FREISLEBEN DE ZANETTI

DANIEL FREIRE E ALMEIDA

..... **11**

*The Evolution of the Regulation of Artificial Intelligence in
Medicine: A Comparative Perspective Among Brazil, Europe,
and the United States*

GABRIELA MARIA DE ALMEIDA TEIXEIRA

VERÔNICA SCRIPTORE FREIRE E ALMEIDA

..... **47**

***European integration as a model of political and economic
development oriented towards globalization***

CAROLINA APARECIDA GALVANESE DE SOUSA

DANIEL FREIRE E ALMEIDA

LUIZ SALES DO NASCIMENTO

..... 83

***Regulation of disease-modifying treatments for Alzheimer’s
disease: a comparative study between the United States and
Brazil***

CÉLIO RAMOS FARIAS

VERÔNICA SCRIPTORE FREIRE E ALMEIDA

MARCELO LAMY

.. 119

Carolina Aparecida Galvanese de Sousa - Daniel Freire e Almeida

— Luiz Sales do Nascimento

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AS A MODEL OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORIENTED TOWARDS GLOBALIZATION ¹

Carolina Aparecida Galvanese de Sousa ^{2*}

Daniel Freire e Almeida ^{3**}

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European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

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Luiz Sales do Nascimento^{4**}

Abstract

After briefly presenting the historical formation of the European Union, this study sets out to identify the aspects that render its composition — the outcome of a historical process aimed at integrating the European nations into a single economic and political bloc — a positive paradigm of international development, an inspirational model worthy of replication by other groupings of States, particularly in view of both the positive results achieved and the need to optimize responses to

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European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

the challenges inherent in today's globalized world, in a peaceful and cooperative manner. The subject gains added significance insofar as the growing prominence of international global governance presents itself as an irreversible trend, together with a resignification of the concept of state sovereignty. Accordingly, notwithstanding its evident vicissitudes, this model demonstrates the political feasibility of its implementation, always taking into account the particular characteristics of each prospective grouping, geography, ideology, culture, and other factors not precluding a collaborative union, capable of resulting in political, social, and economic integration such as to foster, along the lines of the European reference, the long-sought development of all national States committed to such unification. This work follows an exploratory, descriptive research design grounded in bibliographic material, namely, printed books and scientific articles retrieved from the Scielo, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect databases, obtained through searches using the same keywords set out below, together with other authoritative references on the subject, as indicated at the end.

Keywords: European Union; political integration; economic integration; global governance; globalization.

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

Introduction

Arising from a gradual historical construction undertaken to meet economic and political needs, the European Union, the product of the joint endeavor and shared efforts of 27 sovereign nations pursuing communion and the conjugation of interests, unveils a new paradigm of political composition with clear legal, economic, social, and cultural repercussions, one that responds to the recent and irreversible phenomenon of globalization.

Contributing to this phenomenon is the fact that we are living within the flow of a postmodern information society, in which the material and territorial limits of a geographical nature no longer present themselves as obstacles to real-time interaction. The adaptation of human relations to a globalized outlook, grounded in criteria of cooperation and non-belligerent negotiation among States, denotes a productive political maturation that, in light of the evidence, undoubtedly generates progress and development.

In this sense, as a pioneer of this utilitarian and visionary conception, the European Union emerges as a new and successful model of communal formation which, notwithstanding the idiosyncrasies that render it unique and therefore incomparable, carries within itself principles, attributes, and purposes that indeed

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

serve as a kind of inspirational prototype, capable of adoption by other blocs of nations that find, in a similarly structured composition, an integrative mechanism and a driver of development.

In order to bring this perspective to light, the first chapter offers a historical overview of the formation of the European Union, tracing the gradual process of political and economic construction that led to its present configuration.

In the second chapter, following a brief examination of the conception of sovereignty arising from the Peace of Westphalia, and in light of the phenomenon of globalization, consideration will be given to the new outlook that must be applied to global problems and challenges, given the diffuse and cross-border character they have assumed, together with the need to relativize sovereignty as one of the mechanisms of integration indispensable to the new European composition. This chapter will also address the positive aspects of European communal formation, based on the analysis of three indicators used solely for illustrative purposes to exemplify the success of this economic-political aggregate: the increase in GDP and the decline in the unemployment rate over the

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

past 12 years, and the growing commercial relevance assumed within the global scenario.

Finally, the concluding remarks will point to how the success of the European Union's formation, as it presents itself today, the result of a highly well-engineered process of political articulation, establishes a new inspirational model of political and economic integration of common interests among Nation-States, one that may be replicated ambitiously and feasibly by other regional blocs around the world, chiefly owing to its virtue of fostering development through its intrinsic vocation for reconciling the dilemmas, purposes, aspirations, and human needs of its members with a virtually cross-border and globalized world.

1. The historical trajectory of the formation of the European Union

With the end of the Second World War on 8 May 1945, the European countries involved in the conflict emerged with their economies shattered, having suffered strikingly extensive damage and a death toll even greater than that of the First World War, leaving the entire continent and its principal nations weakened.

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

Conversely, the United States became the richest and most powerful nation in the world; during the conflict, it had tripled its industrial capacity, becoming a genuine global economic power, though concerned with the growth of socialism which, with the former USSR as its greatest exponent, represented a potential threat to capitalism.

With a view to erecting a political and economic barrier in Western Europe to contain the advance of the Soviet 'threat,' on 5 June 1947 George C. Marshall, United States Secretary of State, announced the so-called Marshall Plan, which was implemented between 1948 and 1951 under the Truman administration.

The Marshall Plan, subsidized by the American government and coordinated by the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC)⁵, consisted of a financial contribution made available by the United States to Europe, represented by the injection of approximately 17 billion dollars into the European economy through the granting of low-interest loans and cash grants

⁵Created on 16 April 1948 and headed by Robert Marjolin of France, its purpose was to help administer the Marshall Plan. As of 1961, the 'Organisation for European Economic Co-operation' (OEEC) was renamed the 'Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development' (OECD), admitting non-European countries and assuming a broader, multisectoral, and intercontinental scope of action.

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

subject to certain conditions, for the benefit of countries damaged by the war (BRASIL, 2026; OECD, 2026; PORTO, 2019).

As intended, the European nations recovered, and the ties between the United States and Europe grew closer.

Meanwhile, Winston Churchill, who advocated the creation of the 'United States of Europe,' referring to his fellow citizens as the European family, brought a number of recommendations to this effect before the Hague Congress, such as the creation of a deliberative European Assembly (European Parliament), a special European Council entrusted with preparing political and economic integration, and the establishment of a European Court of Justice (SILVA, 2001; EUROPEAN UNION, 2026a; CVCE.EU, 1948).

1949 saw the creation of NATO and the Council of Europe (NATO, 2026).

Still aiming at postwar reconstruction, on 9 May 1950 — a date now designated 'Europe Day' — Robert Schuman, French Minister of Foreign Affairs, in partnership with Jean Monnet, presented a plan for the implementation of cooperative measures among European countries willing to promote the integration of Western Europe's coal and steel industries.

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

Thus, on 18 April 1951, on the basis of what came to be known as the Schuman Plan, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg jointly signed the Treaty of Paris, establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)⁶, placing their heavy coal and steel industries, the driving forces of the economy of the time, under a common management system, facilitating movement between producing areas and consuming regions, and removing tax barriers (FERNANDES; FREIRE E ALMEIDA, 2021; EUROPEAN UNION, 2026b; EUROPEAN UNION, 2026c).

This was because, while coal was essential as the energy source needed to drive Europe forward, steel would lay the foundations of reconstruction, indispensable in every corner of Europe.

On 25 March 1957, the two Treaties of Rome established the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC, or Euratom) (EUROPEAN UNION, 2026d).

The rise of Community legislative activity came with the first session of the European Parliament on 19 March 1958, at which Schuman was elected its president.

⁶This Community formally began operating on 23 July 1952.

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

The creation of EFTA (the European Free Trade Association) on 3 May 1960, and the establishment of a free-trade area on that same date, conferred greater freedom of movement on trade in goods among the European countries, “while nonetheless allowing each member to pursue its own commercial policy with regard to foreign trade” (PORTO, 2017; EFTA.INT, 2026); visible barriers were eliminated (FERNANDES; FREIRE E ALMEIDA, 2021).

This was followed by the adoption of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), implemented on 30 July 1962, which sought to give the countries of the European Economic Community control over food production, once again grounded in integrative and potentially development-oriented purposes (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2026).

Next, as a further step toward unity and integration, the three Communities established up to that point, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the European Economic Community (EEC), and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), merged on 8 April 1965 under the name 'European Communities,' likewise adopting a single administrative body and a single Council, and establishing the common external tariff known as the CET, all pursuant to the pact concluded under the Merger Treaty, or Treaty of Brussels (EUR-LEX, 2026a; EUR-LEX, 2026b).

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

The elimination of customs duties among member countries as of 1 July 1968 became a reality, promoting the free movement of goods produced among them through a common commercial policy, by applying a single external tariff and by negotiating contracts with third countries jointly (EUROPEAN UNION, 2026d).

On 1 January 1973, the Kingdom of Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland formally acceded to the European Communities; Greece (the Hellenic Republic) followed in 1981, and Spain and Portugal five years later, on 1 January 1986.

In 1986 the Single European Act (SEA) was also signed which, by amending the Treaties of Rome, sought to eliminate, within a six-year period, the barriers to the free flow of trade within the European Union, establishing the so-called 'Single Market' (EUR-LEX, 2026c), extending the rupture already begun with the customs union by also removing the “invisible barriers (non-tariff barriers, NTBs)” (PORTO, 2017, p. 195), thereby providing for the free movement of goods, services, and factors — namely, labor and capital.

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

Finally, on 7 February 1992, with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in the Netherlands, the European Union was born, although it entered into force only on 1 November 1993 (EUR-LEX, 2026d).

Fig. 1. The Treaty on European Union, also known as the Maastricht Treaty, surrounded by the signatures of the 12 Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Finance of the Member States



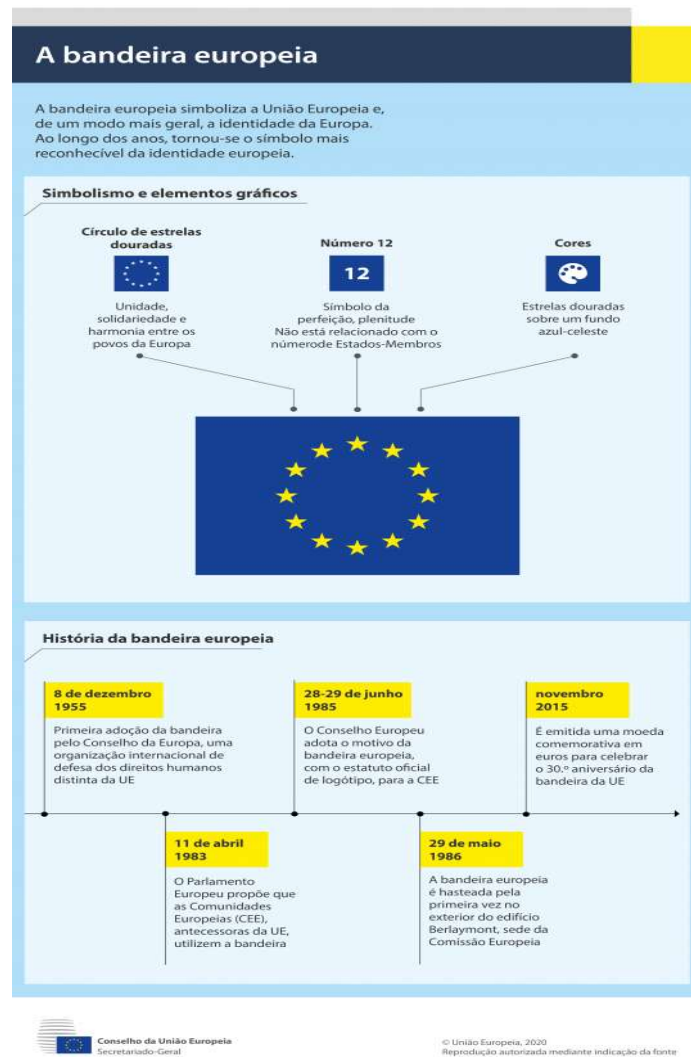
(Source: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/pt/in-the-past/the-parliament-and-the-treaties/maastricht-treaty>).

The following is the representative flag, the political symbol of the Community's identity, whose history and explanatory details are shown in Figure 2 below:

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

Fig. 2. The European flag



(Source: https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/symbols/european-flag_pt).

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

On 1 January 1993, the Single Market also finally came into force, promoting the opening and free movement of persons, goods, services (some not fully liberalized), and capital.

The European Economic Area (EEA) came into being on 1 January 1994, joining the EU Member States with the three EEA-EFTA States (Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway) in an Internal Market governed by the same basic rules, enabling goods, services, capital, and persons to move freely throughout the EEA in an open and competitive environment — a concept known as the four freedoms (EFTA.INT, 2026)⁷.

The European Union gained three new members on 1 January 1995: Austria, Finland, and Sweden.

That same year, on 26 March, the Schengen framework began to apply: Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain, by signing what is regarded as the European Union's greatest achievement (first the Schengen Agreement, on 14 June 1985, and subsequently the Schengen Convention, on 19 June

⁷Persons, goods, services, and capital currently circulate freely among the 30 EEA countries (the EU-27 plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway). Switzerland does not participate in the EEA but has access to the single market. Available at: https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1990-99_pt. Accessed on: 14 Mar. 2026.

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

1990) agreed upon the free movement of both Community and non-Community travelers among these countries in a secure manner and without passport controls at the borders (EUR-LEX, 2026d).

On 1 May 2004, ten new countries joined the EU: Cyprus and Malta, together with eight countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia, finally putting an end to the post-Second World War division of Europe.

Romania and Bulgaria joined the bloc on 1 January 2007, and Croatia on 1 July 2013, bringing the total at that time to 28 nations (FERNANDES; FREIRE E ALMEIDA, 2021).

Subsequently, a referendum held on 23 June 2016 expressed the will of 52% of voters in the United Kingdom to leave the European Union after more than 40 years of membership⁸ (GOV.UK, 2026; EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2026b).

⁸This withdrawal, known as Brexit, took place on 31 December 2020 and was consolidated on 1 January 2021, once again reducing the European Union to a composition of 27 countries (FERNANDES; FREIRE E ALMEIDA, 2021).

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

In 2021, twenty-six countries⁹ formed part of the passport-free Schengen area, including Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland (countries that are not members of the European Union) (PORTUGUESE CONSULATE GENERAL IN SÃO PAULO, 2026).

On 1 January 2023, Croatia became the newest Member State to join the Schengen area, bringing the total number of participating countries to 27.

More recently, Romania and Bulgaria completed their accession to the Schengen area in two stages: checks at internal air and maritime borders were lifted on 31 March 2024, and checks at internal land borders were removed on 1 January 2025, bringing the Schengen area to a total of 29 countries — 25 of the 27 European Union Member States, together with Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. Cyprus remains, at present, the only European Union Member State not yet fully integrated into the Schengen area (COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, 2026a; EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2026g).

⁹These are: Germany, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Switzerland.

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

The euro was established as scriptural currency, limited to commercial and financial transactions, on 1 January 1999, and was introduced in that capacity in only eleven countries, designated the 'eurozone': Germany, Austria, Belgium, Spain, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Portugal.

Physical currency was introduced only in January 2002 (FERNANDES; FREIRE E ALMEIDA, 2021). Since then, the eurozone has continued to expand: Croatia adopted the euro on 1 January 2023, becoming its twentieth member, and Bulgaria followed on 1 January 2026, becoming its twenty-first member (EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK, 2026; COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, 2026b).

As of the time of writing, the following twenty-one Member States have adopted the euro as their official currency: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, and Slovenia, with Czechia, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Sweden remaining outside the eurozone (EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK, 2026).

With the final monetary integration (technically termed positive integration) made possible by the single currency, the most

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

sophisticated and singular form of political-economic integration in world history was consolidated (PORTO, 2019).

2. Revisiting the peace of Westphalia and the relativization of the concept of sovereignty as a mechanism for managing integration in the formation of the European Union

Crises provoke ruptures and the destabilization of a given state of affairs, which at times assumes a positive character owing to the productive transformation it ultimately brings about.

A classic example of this assertion is the Thirty Years' War, a bloody and inglorious event in human history which, followed by the well-known 'Peace of Westphalia' of 1648, enabled States to coexist respectfully and peacefully through the design and experience of the concept of state sovereignty, already developing in embryonic form since the fifteenth century (FERNÁNDEZ; GONZÁLEZ, 2018).

Through the eventual consolidation of this new order, the world sought a political structure of power based on peace and mutual respect, woven together through concordant interaction among national States, abandoning the conflictual conception

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

theretofore prevailing and apparently inseparable from the very notion of power.

Adopted and implemented worldwide, both in domestic policy and in international relations, the concept of sovereignty arising from the Peace of Westphalia is still invoked as a constitutive element of the State, retaining as its foundational premise the bases of its original conception — regarding as a nation any entity endowed with sovereign power: one, absolute, and indivisible.

“Pero es en Westfalia donde la soberanía recibe un reconocimiento internacional y donde se limita el modo a ser ejercida en los siglos posteriores. La pluralidad de Estados negociadores y su intención de representar a la voluntad soberana deriva en un concepto modificado de soberanía. Este concepto mantiene su valor absoluto y total al interior de las fronteras, pero en lo exterior se ve limitado por otras soberanías, y luego por las normas de Derecho Internacional.” (FERNÁNDEZ; GONZÁLEZ, 2018)¹⁰

¹⁰ Free translation: “It is at Westphalia, however, that sovereignty receives international recognition, together with the manner in which it would be exercised in the centuries that followed. The plurality of negotiating States and their intention to represent the sovereign will gave rise to a modified concept of sovereignty. This concept retains its absolute and total character within borders, but abroad it is limited by other sovereignties and, subsequently, by the rules of international law.”

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

That is, internally, as a synonym for supremacy among the derivative legal norms themselves, an exclusive and excluding power from which functions and authority are assigned with a view to achieving national objectives, and externally, as a synonym for independence and legal equality grounded in an originality that distinguishes each State from the other derivative internal orders, projecting itself onto the international system as the sole interlocutor.

Over time, however, with human reorganizations and, once again, the onset of crises destabilizing the concepts and foundations theretofore in place, a reconfiguration of the concept of sovereignty became necessary (FERNÁNDEZ; GONZÁLEZ, 2018).

Although not abandoned or diminished, it is said today that there is a clear relativization in the perception of sovereignty, arising from the process of globalization — notably since the two World Wars of the twentieth century which, as seen in the previous chapter, intensified by the post-Cold War period of the 1990s, served as the driving force behind a new European political construction that began incipiently with the Marshall Plan.

This configuration of a 'new global order,' as termed by Castells, emerging from the power of global networks, social

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

movements, and the unrelenting advance of technology, although it finds insurgent critics¹¹, is a political and social reality that must necessarily be confronted (CASTELLS, 2018).

The ability of States to navigate these internationally oriented phenomena on their own is challenged not only by the interdependence of the economy and of financial and monetary markets worldwide, but also by the inherently cross-border nature of environmental problems, by the boundlessness and lack of control over communication imposed by technology and artificial intelligence, and by the manner in which virtually all human demands have taken on a trans-international character, as exemplified by the globalization of the media and of electronic communication, of crime, of social protest, and of rebellion in the form of terrorism, all of which “compromise the autonomy and decision-making capacity of the Nation-State” (CASTELLS, 2018; NASSER, 2021).

It is certain, therefore, that a “new system of power” has emerged, characterized “by the plurality of sources of authority

¹¹ Among the criticisms leveled is the prognosis that, from a philosophical standpoint, globalization represents the arrival of the 'Big Brother' foreseen for 1984 in the classic work of the same name by George Orwell (Castells, 2018).

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

(and, one might add, of power), with the Nation-State being merely one of those sources” (CASTELLS, 2018).

Consequently, the unification of these same Nation-States into like-minded blocs, for the sake of dynamic and efficient action, presents itself as a trend inherent to the very multifaceted and internationalized set of issues to be addressed, which for the same reason demand a response of comparable scope, in light of globalization.

And starting from the premise that what is global is unified, Schuman's perspective in planting the seed of European integration proves visionary.

Obviously, throughout this entire process, as previously analyzed, an extensive political engineering effort was required, negotiated on the basis of reciprocal concessions in order to accommodate interests cooperatively, in a sequence of relaxations and adjustments of rules and conduct aimed at an integrated composition of nations.

On the basis of these premises, a reflection is already emerging on the role that sovereignty is to play elsewhere within this new political design, given that the admission of norms external to the Nation-State — with the absorption of concepts previously foreign

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

to it, and submission to external decisions with internal repercussions, of a directive nature, as in the case of the European Commission — constitutes a rupture in the then-prevailing view of sovereignty.

Thus, in a logical and interconnected sequence of phenomena, the network-based rapprochement driven by technology, together with the socioeconomic events that follow one another, shape the world within a globalized reconfiguration which, in turn, points to the integrated unification of blocs of nations as an apt strategy for confronting the corresponding challenges, while at the same time demanding a certain degree of renunciation of absolute powers as a sovereign nation — the aforementioned relativization of state sovereignty — precisely on account of the principle of cooperation and negotiated concession aimed at achieving the common objective of the whole, rather than that of a single entity (NASSER, 2021).

Nevertheless, although such premises of integration might apparently give the impression of a deconstruction of the State, the evidence in fact shows that they enhance its capacities.

Political-economic integration stimulates development through the increased circulation of goods and money, as a

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

consequence of the gains derived from specialization brought about by international negotiations and contracts, the exploitation of economies of scale, the abandonment of monopolies, and lower prices, all of which in turn bring about a social readjustment through job creation, the promotion of education, the eradication of poverty, and access to healthcare and a healthy quality of life, all stemming from the reaffirmation arising from human empowerment as a consequence of effectively guaranteed dignity (PORTO, 2017).

Moreover, it has created among the individuals belonging to that community a sense of citizenship distinct from that of their own country, reflecting a form of legitimation and appropriation that goes beyond mere political recognition (CASTELLS, 2018).

Added to this is the evidence of the meteoric development of all the Member States of the European Union since its creation, which can be corroborated by an analysis of the abundant official statistical data provided by the Eurostat website¹².

Solely for illustrative purposes in this study, three indicators will be presented by way of example:

¹²<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>.

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

Fig. 3: Exports of goods and services as a % of GDP



(Source:
<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/bookmark/a0bf4b1d-a9f7-48e7-a38c-a25b35a0f361?lang=en>).

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

The chart above clearly shows the exponential economic growth of the European Union (represented by the blue line), including in relation to the European continent itself (shown by the brown line), through the rise in exports accompanied by GDP growth each year — with the exception of the sharp downturn caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Fig. 4: Unemployment rates by sex, age, and level of education (%)



European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

(Source:
<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/bookmark/f9584954-5d21-49f6-bce4-2bff813be4b9?lang=en>

As a second indicator, the data above show unemployment rates within the European Union which, again with the exception of the brief period of increase and plateau caused by the Covid-19 health crisis in 2019, resumed a sharp decline in 2020.

Furthermore, whatever criteria are applied to the data, there is statistical evidence of improvement across all indicators, in every country that is part of the European Community.

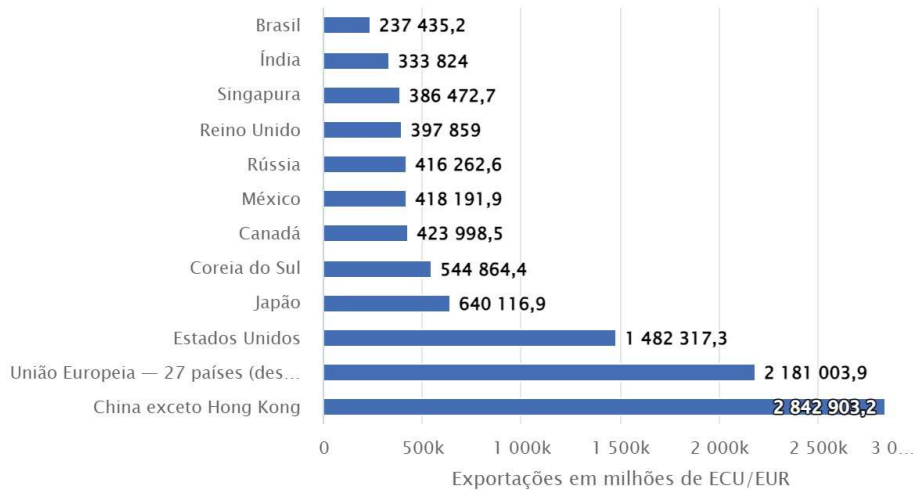
Note also the significant penetration of the European Union in world trade relative to the countries with the greatest international commercial activity (EUROPEAN UNION, 2026e):

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

Fig. 5: Figures on European Union trade

Parte da União Europeia UE27 (a partir de 2020) no comércio mundial



(Source: https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/key-facts-and-figures/economy_pt)

The European Union today accounts for approximately 14% of world trade in goods, ranking, alongside China and the United States, among the three largest participants in international trade (EUROPEAN UNION, 2026f).

It is thus a fact that the success achieved — demonstrated here through only three indicators — shows that, combined with its intrinsic growth potential, the formation of the Community bloc has

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

proved to be a boost to the individual growth of the Member States, offering, as an integrated entity, an optimistic outlook capable of motivating the replication of this model of political-economic composition around the world.

Final Considerations

The successful recovery of the economic and political power of the European countries in less than 50 years after the devastation caused by war and destruction is certainly the fruit of an intelligent and well-articulated policy.

The conception and formation of the European Union, originating from a defensive political and economic construction born of the macro-trend toward globalization and the parallel assertion of identity as a source of meaning, thus arose from a gradual process of juxtaposing interests, negotiations, and cooperative measures aimed at a win-win outcome, pointing toward a new and prosperous model and evidencing the fact that the union of forces in pursuit of the common good is the correct path toward development.

Moreover, comparing the data presented in this study, it is certain that unification through integration presented itself to the

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

European community as a remarkable mechanism for adapting to the phenomenon of globalization which, in the wake of an installed crisis, made possible the leveraging of a new political, economic, and identity-based construction, instilling in the genesis of its nationals an autonomous European identity, parallel to the citizenship of their countries of origin.

It is evident that, being a construct intended to meet political, economic, and social expectations and purposes that are dynamic by nature, it will never attain an ideal and definitive configuration.

Yet it is precisely this capacity for perennial adaptation, made possible by the flexibility afforded by the cooperative participation of its member nations, that constitutes its greatest virtue, enabling — through its management — the harmonious conjugation and reconciliation of nations whose interests, culture, language, education, religion, and other aspects had supposedly rendered coexistence unfeasible.

In this way, the ultimate sophistication of the social and political architecture attained today by the European Union, in view of the positive results obtained, allows it to be regarded as a new paradigm of communal composition on the international stage, undoubtedly inspiring other groups of nations to consider, in light

European integration as a model of political and economic development
oriented towards globalization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23068475>

of their own conditions and circumstances, the formation of political and economic blocs aimed at promoting shared development.

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