What to Read on the European Union

By Kathleen R. McNamara

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Summary: An annotated Foreign Affairs syllabus on the European Union.

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Today's European Union, with its deep integration spanning a variety of policy arenas long thought to be the sole purview of sovereign nations, is a surprising and anomalous political creature. Neither simply an intergovernmental organization nor a full-fledged nation-state, it has resisted simple categorization -- and has repeatedly defied the predictions of scholars and pundits. Today, the EU sits at a difficult crossroads. Its dramatic increase in policy capacity has yet to be matched with mechanisms of democratic representation or streamlined decision-making, leaving it less than effective and often unloved. The best scholarship on the EU illuminates its fitful history, situates it in a broader theoretical context, and helps readers understand the challenges its unique form of governance presents.

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Required reading for anyone interested in the roots of today's EU, Ernst Haas' monumental work, first published in 1958, founded the field of European Union studies. In this sprawling book, Haas lays down the initial premise for functionalism, the idea that establishing policy capacity in one area will likely produce spillover effects in other areas -- with the result being that private and public actors will continue to push for ever greater integration. The founders of the EU themselves appear to have been driven by similar views, intending their creation as a way to lock in peace on a warring continent. Neil Fligstein, Wayne Sandholtz, and Alec Stone Sweet offer a sophisticated, contemporary assessment of the ways such dynamics have played out in dramatic institutional developments across a variety of European policy spheres.

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A modern landmark for the study of the EU, Andrew Moravcsik calls attention not to the subtle, incremental development of the EU described by the functionalists but rather to the forceful role of national governments and their leaders in moving integration forward. His magisterial overview of the pivotal historical moments of European integration, from its beginnings in 1958 to the Maastricht Treaty, reveals the role of domestic commercial interests in pressuring political elites in key countries to negotiate treaties such as those that established the early common market, later dramatically removed barriers in the Single European Act, and created the euro and EMU. Moravcsik's "intergovernmental" approach provides a crucial complement to the functionalist story, reminding us of the key role that national political leaders have played in the European experiment.

European Identity. Edited by Jeffrey T. Checkel and Peter J. Katzenstein. Cambridge University Press

http://www.foreignaffairs.com/features/readinglists/what-to-read-on-the-european-union
Figuring out what the EU is can be hard -- but deciding who the Europeans are can be even harder. Early theorists of European integration anticipated a gradual replacement of national political identities with a shared sense of “Europeanness.” This has not come to pass. Instead, something more interesting has happened: variations within countries and across social classes, age groups, and professions in the way people perceive themselves and their affinity to Europe. Jeffrey Checkel and Peter Katzenstein’s edited volume provides a nuanced overview of the processes of political identity formation, while Adrian Favell investigates at the ground level how a group of “eurostars” (those professionals taking advantage of the single labor market of the EU to live and work outside their home countries) have a very mixed experience of assimilation. Fligstein’s study of the ways in which the benefits of a single European market are unevenly distributed across income groups offers a cautionary tale for enthusiasts of European integration while offering up sociological analysis of the finest order.

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