Introduction – European funding: on the way to a new research agenda for European Integration History?

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European Union (EU) funding does not have a significant presence in the present historical research agenda. However, there is some research being conducted.

The history of European integration and the economic issues are not recent acquaintances. Although much information is available about European funds (both past and present) and their financing potential – in particular in the current funding framework of Horizon 2020 – there has been very little analysis undertaken in the field of research on the subject of the implementation and impact of these same European funds over time. Indeed, although European integration history is by its very nature highly interdisciplinary, its research agendas have not paid particular attention to this topic.

Historiography on European integration has in fact dealt with a number of research topics, but has so far neglected the multiple diversity of European Economic Community/European Union funding. Bearing this in mind, this thematic issue of the *Journal of European Integration History* focuses on EU funding from a broad historical perspective with regard to the conception, changes, distribution, management and outcomes of European funds from the 1950s until 2010.

European Union funding has grown in parallel with European integration itself not only in terms of numbers but also in conception. It has supported a wide range of projects and programmes covering different areas such as agriculture, employment and regional development.

The Treaty of Rome itself highlighted the need to consolidate economic unity among the Member States, which led to the creation of the first two Structural Funds – the European Social Fund, broadly designed to prevent unemployment and to promote integration into the labour market, and the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund for rural development and the improvement of agricultural structures.

Almost two decades later, and following the first enlargement round, a third fund was created – the European Regional Development Fund – which introduced, for the first time, the notion of redistribution between richer and poorer regions of the Community. Then with the third enlargement round, in 1986, the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes were introduced. Thus each enlargement round has led to adaptations in European funding, the history of which has been intertwined with new EEC/EU memberships, remaining valid before, during and after the Eastern enlargement rounds.

In 1987, the Single European Act established a policy of Economic and Social Cohesion. It was designed to help the least well-off countries rise to the challenge of

the Single Market, while the Maastricht Treaty made cohesion a priority objective of the European Union. Apart from that, throughout the history of the EEC/EU, the rules, procedures and priorities of European funding have evolved and various stakeholders have been involved.

This thematic issue of the *Journal of European Integration History* thus aims to contribute primarily to the development of this new research agenda. To do so, it includes a series of seven innovative contributions from both young and established researchers, all originally presented at a conference entitled *Origins, implementation and funding of European policies from the Schuman Plan to Maastricht* that was held in Lisbon on 8 May 2017.

In addition to being innovative and ambitious, the articles seek to go beyond the current state of the art and the more recurrent themes in the historiography of European integration. All of them deal with and have as their common denominator EEC/EU funding, and take different perspectives and employ various methodologies to consider European funds in some of their multiple variables. Hence, this issue brings together case studies of certain Member States – a founder member (Italy), a member with over 30 years' Community experience (Spain) and more recent members (Slovakia and Romania) – and of certain policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy and the European Development Fund, which span a large time period from the mid 1950s to the last decade.

The first group of articles covers fragments of the history of the application of the first funds with the somewhat unclear labyrinthine paths of their application and the disrespect shown for the norms (including Community legislation itself) at a time when personal relations and a lack of transparency were prevalent and there was no clear or effective system of accountability; in the same way, they also show the rivalries and national preferences that were ubiquitous when it came to the creation, access and distribution of European funds over time.

In the case of the European Development Fund, established by the Treaty of Rome, Véronique Dimier's article focuses on the management (organisation, concession and implementation) of development assistance projects operated by DG VIII and in particular by its Director Jacques Ferrandi. It throws light on the intricate workings that characterised how this Directorate-General functioned and its practices between 1963 and 1975, which basically came down to a patron-client system used to serve French interests and those of the leaders of certain African states. The article makes it clear that approval of projects resulted from French national preferences, and even those of the Director of DG VIII himself, and from autonomous criteria in collusion with local African elites and the webs of corruption that resulted therefrom. In addition, the author also succeeds in demonstrating how uncomfortable this made the other Member States feel, particularly Germany, and its attempts to ensure its companies also benefitted from the Fund, and later the United Kingdom.

Another Member State who was also part of this equation was the Netherlands. Robin de Bruin's article – which relates decolonisation to European integration and development aid – shows how the establishment of the association policy and the

Development Assistance Fund were created to satisfy French neo-colonial interests and to assuage Dutch post-colonial self-righteousness. The author highlights the fact that Dutch enthusiasm for the EEC was a result of its post-1949 decolonisation and was considered the next best option following the loss of her colonial empire. He further claims that, greatly affected as she was, the Netherlands' attitude towards the EEC's association policy and the policy of development assistance was imbued with "post-colonial complacency". Generally speaking, the article shows how a Member State is able to influence and take advantage of a policy (development assistance) for the benefit of its own territory and companies through a case study applied to the Dutch Indies and West New Guinea, particularly between the years 1945 and 1956.

In the middle of the 1970s, the EEC adopted a regional policy instrument, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), to combat the socio-economic inequalities existing at that time between Member States and their regions. Such was the case of the disparities that existed between Britain's prosperous South-East and its industrial North-West, or between Northern Italy and the Southern *Mezzogiorno*.

On exactly this point, Antonio Bonatesta's article focuses on the regional policy applied to economic development with a case study of the application of ERDF in the Puglia region of Italy during two decades (1972-1992). It argues that the "Cassa per il Mezzogiorno" was more effective in applying ERDF funds than the regions were. The article deals briefly with the beginning of ERDF and the confrontations that existed from the very beginning between contributing countries and beneficiary countries. In addition to the directives of the funds themselves, each Member State defines its own preferential areas of intervention, which are not watertight but evolve over time and are related to each country's economy and the evolution of its own society. In the case of Puglia, this represented a slight change in the years under analysis from projects in the agricultural area to projects involving urban development. The author demonstrates in general the difficulties Italy faced in applying ERDF as well as how national factors such as inflation and public debt, or programming and management capability, or even the very characteristics of a region, can affect the successful implementation of funds and, ultimately, their effectiveness.

The Common Agricultural Policy has been ubiquitous since the first years of the EEC and has always occupied a prominent place. Many issues of Community financing are concentrated within it, particularly as it represents a large slice of the budget.

Unlike the other articles in this thematic issue, Marko Lovec's article is of a more theoretical nature and discusses whether Historical Institutionalism or, alternatively, Rational Choice Institutionalism are the best theoretical frameworks to explain the changes that took place in the Common Agricultural Policy during the 1980s. To this end, he analyses the developments of this common policy and relates it to negotiations for the Community budget and the decision-making process of the Member States, while not forgetting the role of the European Commission. In his conclusion, the author underlines that, in the end, the logics of appropriateness and consequences both represent relevant frameworks that contribute to the understanding of the CAP

crisis in that period, as the first confirmed the impossibility to separate choices from the institutional framework, and the latter demonstrated the ability of key actors to achieve their interests.

In January 1989, a major reform of the EEC's structural funds took place preceded by the alterations defined by the Single European Act. From then on, the repayment mechanism practice was abandoned and co-financing and partnerships were the order of the day, with greater coordination by the EEC and between its various funds and with a greater delimitation of the areas of intervention as well. The themes of social policy, regional disparities, and economic and social cohesion progressively entered first into the debate and then into Community jargon, jargon that was only mastered by a group of specialists and until today remains largely separate from the vocabulary of European integration historians.

Another case study which relates to the beginning of the 1990s on the occasion of the approval of the Treaty of Maastricht, to Spain and to cohesion funds, is presented by Cristina Blanco Sío-López. In her article she seeks to demonstrate how the Spanish government authorities, faced with internal and external constraints, tried to obtain the greatest possible material gain after accession. The author also says that in order to understand the cohesion policy in Spain, it is necessary to understand the internal tensions that affected the country between 1991 and 1996 since, owing to internal difficulties, the Government gave priority to European policy, maybe in an attempt to solve its internal problems externally (in Europe). Consequently, in this period Spain made economic and social cohesion the mainstay of its European policy. This led the author to conclude that ultimately Spain was more interested in taking advantage of European ideas for her own economic benefit than in defending and sharing them.

Defence of national interests is in fact something that permeates the whole history of European integration, becoming even more salient when any type of funding is under discussion. Over the years, however, a transition in the management of the funds has occurred from a national mark to a more Community one. In the beginning, the distribution of funds basically respected the logic of national quotas, under which the money was transferred from the Community budget to projects already delineated by Member States; today the procedures are much more complex and competitive.

Traditionally, States compete for a larger slice of financing or, if that is impossible, for the greatest possible number of compensatory allowances from the Community budget and its resources. What also enters into this equation is the balance of power between States in respect of their capacity to not only obtain funds (in an initial phase) but also to implement them (in a later phase). This leads us in turn to another interesting question, this time related to the use of Community resources *versus* the spending capacity of the Member State, in other words, up to what point a certain State is, or remains, dependent on the EEC/EU to implement its projects.

Finally, the second group of articles deals with more recent issues in the context of the two rounds of enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe in 2004 and 2007.

They thus go beyond historically circumscribed borders although elements may be taken from them for comparison with past cases.

The history of the concession of EU funds does not begin however with accession but before this with the granting of pre-accession aid. After this, the new Member State also comes to have access to and to benefit from structural funds in much higher amounts. In various cases, pre-accession aid was frequently implemented at the same time and when the state had already accessed structural funds. This was for example the case of Portugal in the 1980s and Romania in the 2000s. The argument supports the fact that through different case studies, albeit in different periods, it is possible to ascertain similarities at the level of procedures, timings, achievements, sustainability of projects and quality of investments.

Lucia Mokrá's article deals precisely with pre-accession programmes. She analyses the influence of EU financing on the development of associate countries and its impact on the accession of a new Member State in general; in particular, she focuses on the implementation of PHARE in the area of freedom and justice and in the reform of the judicial system in Slovakia. The author concludes that without PHARE the Slovakian judicial system would not have become so efficient, independent and effective and that the country would have failed in its timely achievement to guarantee the rule of law within the framework of the Copenhagen Criteria, which would then have delayed its accession to the EU. She also adds that the success of the implementation of the measures in this respect led to the beginning of a highly successful transformation of the country's judicial system and even to define the country as a more democratic society, particularly from the point of view of application of the law and access to justice.

Another question that is always present when one discusses European funds is that of their management at a national level, and what this involves at the level of public but also private structures, and what this ultimately represents for their absorption capacity.

In their article Nicolae Păun and Adrian Corpădean call attention precisely to the specificities of each Member State and its political and even economic management culture by highlighting that Romania had (and still has) to overcome some challenges in the field of funds absorption, particularly in respect of the country's management culture and its economic development. The country's first contact with European funds also happened before accession through the pre-accession programmes ISPA, PHARE and SAPARD. The authors consider this to have been the first major test for the development of a true management culture, which had positive results but also suffered delays, fragilities and errors, a situation that is transversal to all Member States. This learning curve proved useful particularly as it led to defining the need to create an efficient project management culture, which would result in the biggest possible absorption of the funds the country would have access after joining, as well as to the definition of priorities. Even then, it can be seen how the country attached a great deal of importance to the management and application of European funds, to such an extent that it actually created the post of a Minister of European Funds!

The dominant, and transversal, note to the various articles in this thematic issue is basically that as a result of having access to and deriving benefits from European funds, Member States have developed economically in various areas and society has advanced, with a percentage of non-reimbursable funds, no large loans and reasonable state subsidies.

Overall, this series of articles points to the involvement (be it positive or negative) of public, private and Community agents in the programming and implementation of projects, the constraints (state, organisational, human) that exist, and some of the results obtained. Taken together, the articles show how the national sphere and national interests are mixed up with and/or involved in Community financing in its various phases: the setting up of a certain fund, the allocation of funds (both of contributions and to beneficiaries), and the management and implementation of funding (the absorption capacity).

European integration history has forged its own path, dealing with different themes over time and thus creating new research agendas that have covered the history of actors, institutions and policies. Even so, certain topics like this one have been neglected. Therefore, let this work be an opportunity to initiate a new research agenda with systematic in-depth studies into the conception, application and evaluation of European funds from a historiographical perspective. The future will dictate whether this area of research advances or not, and what progress is made. At any rate, this is most definitely a new topic with huge potential.

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