Emanuele Monaco, *L'Europa di Jean Monnet. Una biografia transatlantica*, Viella, Roma, 2024, pp. 312.

While writing this review, transatlantic relations are undergoing a period of profound uncertainty and potential redefinition, driven by the convergence of long-term structural trends and immediate political developments. Among the structural factors there are the lasting effects of the 2007-2008 economic and financial crisis, which seriously weakened the public confidence in the European project; the unresolved legacies of EU and NATO enlargements in the late 1990s and early 2000s; the widespread resurgence of populism and nationalism; and Europe's declining centrality in global affairs, reflected in a noticeable decrease in U.S. strategic engagement.

These deeper trends have intersected with more recent political events, including the war in Ukraine, rising global tensions, and the return of Donald J. Trump to the U.S. presidency in 2025 accompanied by a renewed, and in some respects unprecedented, criticism of NATO. In this context, defence has once again become a key issue within European debates, reviving long-standing questions about the continent's strategic autonomy and its dependence on the United States. Significantly, the current momentum behind European defence seems to rely more on national rearmament initiatives than on coordinated supranational efforts. While the EU's collective response to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic briefly suggested a shift toward a greater unity, that moment now appears more the exception than the rule.

Against this backdrop of political uncertainty and institutional strain, the very meaning and trajectory of the European project have once again become a matter of public and political contestation. Originally envisioned as a mechanism for securing peace and economic cooperation, European integration today appears both as a rallying point for pro-European demonstrations and as a target of growing scepticism from national leaders. On March 18, 2025, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, addressing the Chamber of Deputies, explicitly distanced herself from the vision of Europe outlined in the Ventotene Manifesto – drafted in 1941 by Altiero Spinelli, Ernesto Rossi, and Eugenio Colorni – stating that such a model does not align with her own political stance. Her statement underscores the ongoing ideological divisions over the European Union's future, reflecting not only a resurgence of anti-federalist sentiment but also an implicit shift in the historical narrative surrounding European integration. Given that the Ventotene Manifesto was drafted in opposition to fascism while its authors were confined on the small island of Ventotene, Meloni's remarks signal a departure from a historical consensus that had long framed European unification as a direct response to the authoritarianism

of the past. In this shifting political landscape, thinking about Europe – what it represents, its place in the world, and the direction of its foreign policy – also means looking back at the reasons for its creation, the ambitions that shaped its foundations, and the inherent limits of its project.

Over the past decades the historiography on European integration has evolved significantly, reflecting broader methodological shifts in historical scholarship and changing political contexts. Initially, it was centred on the history of ideas, with a focus on the visionary blueprints and normative discourses that shaped early proposals for the political and economic union of European countries. Scholars highlighted the competing federalist and functionalist projects, emphasizing the role of intellectuals in imagining a peaceful and united continent after the devastation of two world wars.

By the late twentieth century, scholarly approaches to European integration increasingly emphasized the legacy of the Second World War and the strategic realignments that followed. The political dimension of Europe's construction became more pronounced. Historians such as Tony Judt, William I. Hitchcock, Mark Gilbert, and Mark Mazower highlighted the political logic and largely positive outcomes of the integration process.[1] Others – such as Alan Milward and Geir Lundestad – shifted the focus toward pragmatic statecraft, national interest, and the reconstruction of Europe within the framework of American international strategy.[2] In their accounts, initiatives such as the Marshall Plan, NATO, and the broader bipolar logic of the Cold War were central to the post-war European order. European integration appeared less as a utopian project and more as a functional response to pressing political and economic needs, with the United States playing a key enabling role- so much so that Mary Nolan famously referred to the twentieth century as the "Transatlantic Century."[3]

More recently, scholarship has expanded its temporal and spatial horizons. There is a growing recognition of the need to move beyond a narrow Eurocentric or post-war framing, incorporating the global

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[1] T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*, Penguin, London, 2005; W.I. Hitchcock, *The Struggle for Europe: The History of the Continent Since 1945*, Profile Books, London, 2003; M. Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, Penguin, London, 1998; M. Gilbert, *European Integration: A Concise History*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2012.

[2] A.S. Milward, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1945-1951*, Routledge, London, 1984; G. Lundestad, *Empire by Integration: The United States and European Integration, 1945-1997*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998.

[3] M. Nolan, *The Transatlantic Century: Europe and America, 1890-2010*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012.

context of decolonization, the end of European empires, and the reconfiguration of global economic systems. As scholars such as Giuliano Garavini and Kiran Klaus Patel have shown, European integration cannot be fully understood without considering the pressures and influences exerted by global transformations.[4] The end of the empire, in particular, reframed the priorities of European powers, compelling them to seek new forms of relevance and stability through continental cooperation.

Parallel to this global turn, there has been a methodological shift toward longue durée perspectives that trace the roots of integration well beyond the immediate post-1945 moment, as recently exemplified by Mathieu Segers.[5] Rather than interpreting the European project solely as a reactive response to war and crisis, historians now emphasize its deep intellectual, economic, and political foundations, identifying continuities from the interwar period, the legacy of nineteenth-century internationalism, and earlier transnational movements and exchanges.[6] This approach draws the attention to how integration was shaped by layered historical processes, including evolving institutions, recurring geopolitical and financial crises, and the accumulation of transnational experiences across multiple generations.

Crucially, this enriched historiography underlines the transnational – and ultimately global – dimension of European integration. It illuminates the ways in which the paths toward unification were influenced by networks of actors, ideational exchanges, and institutional learning that cut across national boundaries. Biographical approaches have become particularly influential in this regard. The lives and careers of figures like Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer, and Alcide De Gasperi provide insight into how individual agency, religious beliefs, and historical memory converged in advancing the integrationist agenda. Similarly, institutional actors such as Walter Hallstein, the first President of the European Commission, and Jacques Delors, the architect of the Single Market and Economic and Monetary Union, illustrate the increasing importance of technocratic leadership, policy innovation, and bureaucratic expertise within the supranational framework.

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[4] G. Garavini, *After Empires: European Integration, Decolonization, and the Challenge from the Global South 1957-1986*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012; K.K. Patel, *Project Europe: A History, Cambridge University Press*, Cambridge, 2020.

[5] M. Segers, *The Origins of European Integration: The Pre-History of Today's European Union, 1937-1951*, Cambridge University Press, Cambrige, 2023.

[6] D.T. Rogers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

Together, these historiographical developments reflect a more nuanced, multi-scalar, and interdisciplinary understanding of European integration – one that situates it at the intersection of national, continental, and global forces, and that recognizes both its contested origins and its evolving aspirations.

Yet perhaps no figure better embodies the intersection of long-term historical perspective, transnational engagement, and institutional innovation than Jean Monnet. Unlike more overtly ideological, intellectual, and political figures such as Altiero Spinelli, Monnet, an entrepreneur and financial broker, pursued a pragmatic, functionalist approach based on economic cooperation and technocratic expertise. His strategy relied on the progressive pooling of sovereignty through concrete achievements – starting with the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1952 – rather than on a predefined constitutional framework. Monnet's legacy has long been a subject of debates, with some scholars portraying him as a visionary architect of integration and others as a skilled bureaucrat working within constraints. What remains clear is that Monnet's influence derived not only from his formal political authority but from his ability to activate transnational networks of economists, planners, and policymakers.

It is precisely the complex, multi-layered dimension of Jean Monnet's life and work that is captured in Emanuele Monaco's *L'Europa di Jean Monnet. Una biografia transatlantica* (Viella, 2024), a welcome contribution to the historiography of European integration. The book is a carefully researched and conceptually rich study that offers a new perspective on one of the key figures of the twentieth-century international history. By emphasizing Monnet's role as a mediator and broker within a wide network of transatlantic relationships, Monaco seeks to shift attention from institutional narratives to the informal and personal dimensions of international cooperation. The result is a work that engages meaningfully with current debates on the origins of the European project and the broader history of transnational governance.

The volume is structured chronologically, covering Monnet's trajectory from his early experiences in the world of wartime logistics and interwar finance to his crucial role in shaping postwar European reconstruction and integration. It begins with his formative years in the family business of cognac production and export – a background that Monaco convincingly presents as foundational to Monnet's early exposure to international trade and transnational networks. Among its nine chapters and conclusion, the book explores moments both well known – such as the drafting of the Schuman Declaration or the negotiations for the European Coal and Steel Community – and less familiar, such as Monnet's activity in China or his involvement with the early

League of Nations financial initiatives. The introduction sets out the theoretical framework, drawing from political science and sociology, while later chapters develop a biographical narrative rooted in a wide array of archival sources.

Monaco's approach is strongly shaped by recent historiographical developments that challenge the idea of 1945 as a clear rupture. He draws attention to long-term continuities linking the interwar and postwar periods, especially through the activities of individuals like Monnet who operated across national boundaries and within flexible, informal networks. This *longue durée* perspective is well grounded in archival research conducted in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland, and supported by a broad bibliography.

The book is particularly effective when it situates Monnet within this broader transatlantic space. Chapters on his early work in logistics during the First World War, his role in the League of Nations, and his financial activities in interwar Europe and China highlight the diversity of experiences that shaped his worldview. The sections covering the 1940s and 1950s – when Monnet played a central role in the French reconstruction effort, the Marshall Plan, and the institutional birth of European integration – are detailed and well contextualized, though occasionally they revisit ground already familiar to specialists. Still, Monaco's focus on trust, cultural transfer, and informal diplomacy adds nuance to our understanding of how the European project took shape.

One of the key contributions of the book is its use of concepts such as networks, brokerage, and political entrepreneurship to frame Monnet's influence. Monaco is particularly interested in the question of how Monnet managed to shape key international decisions without holding formal political office for most of his life. His method – based on cultivating trust and friendships, coordinating actors, and identifying political openings – is portrayed as both effective and emblematic of a broader shift in how international governance operated in the twentieth century.

A further strength of the book lies in its capability of integrating multiple historiographical strands – ranging from the history of European integration to diplomatic history and the study of transnational elites – without losing coherence. The biographical thread remains strong throughout, and Monaco manages to avoid both excessive idealization and overly critical distancing. While he clearly sees Monnet as a central figure, he also addresses the limits of his influence and the exclusivity of the elite networks he helped construct. This reviewer has also appreciated Monaco's attention to Monnet's personal life – most notably his marriage to Silvia de Bondini – which, as the author

shows, unexpectedly facilitated the creation of new contacts and access to additional spheres of influence. The final chapters provide a thoughtful discussion of the supranational model's constraints and the difficulties Monnet faced in adapting his methods to a rapidly changing geopolitical context.

The book leaves ground for further research, as the author himself acknowledges certain limitations in the available documentation – especially regarding Monnet's early career – partly due to the loss of key primary sources during the Nazi occupation of France.

L'Europa di Jean Monnet is a valuable and well-executed work that will be of interest to historians of European integration, international relations, and political biography. Its emphasis on transatlantic dynamics, combined with a robust archival foundation and an interdisciplinary approach, makes it a good addition to the literature on the informal and relational dimensions of modern international politics. Without claiming to offer a definitive portrait, Monaco's book provides a stimulating and carefully grounded interpretation of Monnet's role and legacy.

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