December 1999

THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW

Book Review

Europe: Early Modern and Modern

Andrew Moravcsik. *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht*. (Cornell Studies in Political Economy.) Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1998. Pp. xii, 514. $22.50.

Andrew Moravcsik, a political scientist, has produced a book that few historians working today would have dared write and fewer still could have accomplished. It is the most important work in the field since Alan Milward's *The Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1945–1951* (1984) and the most ambitious interpretation of its subject yet written.

Moravcsik asks, and persuasively answers, the most basic question about European integration: why have Western European states agreed to give supranational institutions ever wider powers to control their external economic relations and, to a large degree, their internal economic policies? Not, Moravcsik argues, because they were told to do so by farseeing technocrats like Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman. Nor did they act in response to geopolitical pressures, in which the Cold War served to galvanize European unity. Nor, finally, was integration the result of a "spillover" from small agreements over coal and steel production or atomic energy to broader, more ambitious treaties. European states surrendered national control over economic policy because they believed, paradoxically, that to do so would serve their national interests. European integration was driven by considerations of national advantage and economic interest.

To make his case, Moravcsik examines not just the origins of the 1957 Treaty of Rome—the founding document of the European Economic Community (EEC)—but four other major episodes in the history of European integration: the shaping of the Common Market in the 1960s, the negotiation of the European Monetary System in the 1970s and 1980s, the Single European Act of 1986, and the Maastricht Treaty of 1991 that framed the European Union (EU). In each case, he argues that national economic interests drove policymakers toward agreement and that geopolitical factors, such as French efforts to assert grandeur in the Gaullist period or British efforts to counter a Franco-German alliance, were only secondary concerns.

This leads to new interpretations. For example, Moravcsik rejects the view that the Suez Crisis of 1956 contributed to the Franco-German agreement for a customs union—what would become the EEC—in favor of a strictly economic interpretation that sees French economic elites as moving gradually away from a policy of protection toward one of trade liberalization and modernization. More surprising is his treatment of Charles de Gaulle's policy toward the EEC. In 1963, de Gaulle vetoed Britain's application to join the EEC. He did so, claims Moravcsik, not because of his commitment to French grandeur and his desire to promote a Franco-German strategic duopoly in Europe but to bolster French agriculture. With Britain in the EEC, de Gaulle could never secure European agreement to the Common Agricultural Policy, whose massive subsidies he believed were vital for French agricultural modernization. Moravcsik presses the argument into the 1980s: the Single Europe Act reflected a renewed appreciation by key European leaders that technological and industrial competition with the United States could only be maintained through the creation of a single market. Finally, the progress in the early 1990s toward a single currency and a European Central Bank, he argues, was driven by German desires to expand trade and increase capital mobility in Europe while maintaining low inflation; it did not derive from France's geopolitical concerns about a united Germany.

Moravcsik has returned economics to the forefront of the history of European integration. He has mastered a vast, multilingual secondary literature (though he draws on fewer primary sources). He courageously challenges the conventional wisdom on virtually every issue, and succeeds in debunking the tired claims of the memoirists that a handful of internationalist technocrats created the new Europe. Moravcsik shows that the EU has not weakened or superseded the nation-state; on the contrary, the EU was designed to serve the interests of competing, dynamic national economies in Europe.

Moravcsik at times overstates his argument in placing economic priorities above political-strategic objectives when it is often impossible to separate these two motive forces. Why did the French governments in 1956–1958 support trade liberalization? They did so as part of an overall reassessment of the bases of French power that took place in the last years of the Fourth Republic. In 1956, France was in its twelfth year of colonial war, searching for a strategy that looked beyond the timeworn ideology of imperial preference and protection and toward one of European integration, alliance solidarity, and nuclear independence. Why did de Gaulle seek to bolster French agriculture in the 1960s? Because he sought a parallel in agriculture to the industrial modernization undertaken by the Fourth Republic, believing that a strong economy assured global influence. And considering the Single Europe Act, can we not see Europe's concern over its fading global economic competitiveness in the mid- 1980s as an issue both of economic and strategic importance?

The German experience makes this point. Chancellors from Konrad Adenauer to Helmut Kohl carefully balanced strategic and economic imperatives, giving equal weight to both during the Cold War and even restraining their economic objectives for the sake of alliance solidarity and especially relations with France. Moravcsik sometimes projects his own rational and calculated analysis onto the policy makers themselves, who may have cherished subtlety and flexibility over consistency. Diplomacy rarely offers stark choices and neat delineations. Rather than separate geopolitics from economics, historians of contemporary Europe—like the policy makers they study—must work to integrate these two elements into a common narrative.

William I. Hitchcock
Wellesley College