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Gérard Bossuat, *Faire l'Europe sans défaire la France. 60 ans de politique d'unité européenne des gouvernements et des présidents de la République française (1943-2003)*. Brussels: P. I. E. Peter Lang, 2005. 630 pp. €54.50, \$64.95 U.S. (cl.) ISBN 90-5201-249-0.

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This generous publication from an authoritative historian of European integration tackles the puzzle of French government and presidential policy towards European political union/unity (terms used interchangeably here) since 1944. We are offered 200 pages of comment plus 357 pages of 100 collected texts, and almost each and every one of these is preceded by a short introduction. Completing the volume is a comprehensive chronology charting decisive moments in France's engagement with European integration, followed by a seven-page bibliography of almost exclusively French-language and historical secondary sources.

The commentary itself is chronologically ordered into nine chapters which reconstruct France's journey into European integration. The account begins at the Liberation in 1944 when anything was possible ("tout est possible", p. 29); it reviews the momentous decisions of the Fourth Republic, and then works its way through each Fifth Republic President in turn, crisply characterising their European policy: the "European Europe" of Charles de Gaulle; the "pragmatic Europe" of Georges Pompidou; the convoluted "confederated Europe of governments" of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing; François Mitterrand's European "model"; and Jacques Chirac's "European Federation of Nation-States."

The story ends mid-way through Chirac's second term before, crucially, the referendum of May 2005 when 54 percent of the French electorate voted to reject the European Union's constitutional treaty. Bossuat's history focuses explicitly on elites, leaders, and personalities, and not on public opinion, so we would be wrong to look here for signs that the French electorate would vote down its president's policy on Europe in 2005. However, we could deduce from Bossuat's guarded analysis that "making Europe without undoing France" (the title of the book: *Faire l'Europe sans défaire la France*, derived from a statement made by Foreign Minister Georges Bidault in 1953 in relation to the European Defence Community [p. 52]) requires a combination of leadership, luck, and timing that since 2002 has not necessarily been forthcoming. Moreover, the splits within the French political establishment in 2005 that contributed so significantly to the "no" vote of 29 May 2005 are presaged in the history of the previous six decades, as is the growing significance of the divided loyalties of the French *people* ("leur double fidélité à la nation et à l'Europe", p. 27).

The puzzle that Bossuat sets out to solve is encapsulated in the title of the introductory chapter, namely the precise nature of the sixty-year old "desire for [European] unity" that he deems to have driven all French leaders since 1944. The first lesson that he and we learn here is that Robert Schuman's declaration of 9 May 1950 was an "accident" of history, a *coup* against many inside the French political establishment (such as the French ambassador to London, René Massigli, p. 48), a one-off act of statesmanship. It veered sharply away from "traditional" French policy towards Europe up to that date (other than in its emphasis on harmonising markets across borders), and has never been matched since for boldness or effectiveness. The key to its success lay in exploiting what Bossuat calls the "ère du temps" (p. 285), namely an ephemeral combination of circumstances. Thus, the Schuman declaration did not set France on a steady, linear course of developments leading inexorably towards European unity,

so precarious were its domestic foundations. Yet it did encapsulate a “problématique” (p. 21) and set the terms of engagement with Europe which have marked French policy ever since.

The “problem” consists of a set of fears, obsessions and relationships which are admirably illustrated in Bossuat’s choice of texts, especially from the earlier periods for which archives are accessible. Fear of Germany is most evident, unsurprisingly, in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Schuman plan and the ensuing European Coal and Steel Community cut through this natural obsession, and paved the way for friendly and constructive relations. The failure of the French political establishment to ratify the European Defence Community (EDC) in 1954 did not reverse this trend, but did put a brake on political *union* as such; with ‘union’ here being defined, it would seem, as Europe’s capacity to act as an international superpower, or *puissance*. Behind the EDC defeat, of course, is the United Kingdom (UK), or rather, the absence of UK support for this plan, for the ECSC before it, or for the European Economic Community/Common Market after it. Bossuat admirably reflects the complexity of the Franco-British relationship at all points in this sixty-year history. On more than one occasion, especially in the 1950s, Britain missed the opportunity to dictate terms to France, for reasons of an economic order that Bossuat is eventually forced to characterise as arrogant and/or short-sighted. French policy on these and subsequent occasions—during de Gaulle’s presidency for example—was thus a case of making-do without Britain, rather than a deliberate attempt to exclude or alienate its cross-Channel neighbour.

Similarly, French relations with the USA are portrayed here in very pragmatic terms, a far cry from the emotive language with which the transatlantic relation is frequently depicted. France’s only real “obsession” in this direction concerned arrangements to protect the rekindled French economy from unfair US competition, particularly in the post-war years, in the context of the very powerful motivation of French leaders to avoid at all costs the isolation of France on the international stage. We are encouraged to see the “Realpolitik” (pp. 80-81) behind France’s commitment to the 1957 Treaty of Rome in similar terms: a domestic consensus in favour of the treaty was only forthcoming once preconditions aimed at protecting France’s overseas markets, particularly in its African colonies, were imposed upon France’s partners. The inability of French and British leaders to agree on the terms of market access to their respective spheres of influence was thus a key factor sinking any hope of a common market including both France and the UK, at least in the late 1950s.

More troublesome than all these factors per se were the terms of engagement that flowed logically from their existence. Thus, France’s commitment to European integration has been dogged by the question of sovereignty, which Bossuat portrays as having being leached out of the French political system, to the point of creating a vacuum which leaders have failed to fill. Each president of the Fifth Republic has had to decide upon how far he could cede sovereignty to the EU’s institutions. Only François Mitterrand, in this account, is portrayed as having tried to reconcile French people with the nature of this deal, via the referendum on the Maastricht Treaty of 1992; subsequent events, such as the “no” vote in the 2005 referendum, would suggest that he only partially succeeded at best. Furthermore, Bossuat opts out of interpreting the narrow “yes” to the Maastricht referendum, despite the existence of a wealth of literature on the subject, although he does indicate that it might have been a negative response to the President *qua* President, and not to his European policy. Such is Bossuat’s untempered enthusiasm for François Mitterrand, however, that readers will not find a robust critique of Mitterrand’s European legacy here; indeed, we learn (p. 183) that: “Il a pleinement réussi à mettre en accord ses convictions, ses sentiments, les intérêts de la France en Europe et sa responsabilité de chef d’État avec le grand mouvement de l’Histoire vers l’unité européenne”: some task indeed.

Bossuat’s view that all presidents since and including George Pompidou have acknowledged that “Europe” exists as a unique and separate political entity in its own right, and have sought to adapt France accordingly, is more credible. Thus Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, through the creation of the

European Council, attempted to link the community and intergovernmental methods of decision-making, with some success—although Bossuat subsequently dubs him a “pseudo-federalist” (p. 157) with no real feel for the Community institutions (a picture, we might add, that Giscard’s time as President of the Convention on the Future of Europe in 2003–4 did nothing to dispel). Pompidou before him had also adroitly worked to “deepen” and “complete” the common market in policy terms (the Common Agricultural Policy; economic and monetary union), and of course had sealed Britain’s entry into the Common Market, and forced a vote by referendum at home on that issue. De Gaulle too is portrayed here as having sought to construct a European entity with its own identity (*l’Europe européenne*); yet he failed to overcome his partners’ suspicions that the Gaullist “desire for unity” was driven by chauvinism and a quest for *grandeur* at their expense. For Bossuat, de Gaulle’s vision of European unity was marred by nostalgia for France’s past, but was no less pertinent or relevant—still today—to Europe’s needs.

De Gaulle’s failing, ultimately, was that he could not persuade his partners that European unity was *necessary*, and not merely the product of a fevered or grandiose imagination. Indeed, the main lesson that Bossuat draws from his research here is that France’s engagement with European integration was driven at all key moments by a realistic assessment of available options in order to secure security and, if not status, then influence. Bossuat concludes that the resulting French quest for European unity, despite the ups and downs, has been successful, in that European unity is currently a “réalité vivante” (p. 213), however incomplete it may be—a rather ambivalent conclusion, we would suggest, although he means, not without foundation, that Europe *in its own right* has come round to seeking security, status and/or influence, however flawed the results. Optimism certainly prevails at this point in the work, and Bossuat allows himself a little passion, calling on a “generous” and “enthusiastic” France (p. 219) to make “bold” proposals for the future of Europe, taking care to avoid the arrogance of assuming that all other partners—and indeed the French population—is on board. This exhortation is of course made in the context of the Chirac years, and Chirac is damned with faint praise in this work, deemed as lacking a message of hope for France in Europe in the twenty-first century. This, Bossuat concludes, is dangerous, at a time when he considers France and the French still to be adjusting to the notion that France’s days of offering a universal model—of democracy?—are numbered.

Thus Bossuat answers many important questions about the last sixty years of French engagement with European integration. Specifically, he corroborates for historians what Craig Parsons (unknown, it would appear, to Bossuat) established for political scientists and economists[1], namely that the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950 was of course far from a foregone conclusion: it did not flow logically from French policy on Germany and Europe to that date; it had its opponents; there were other ideas for stabilising the French economy and Franco-German relations. But it was the idea with the most persuasive backer (Jean Monnet), the right timing, and the best luck, in a context—the early days of European integration—where ideas and their promoters mattered as much as material interests. Thus there occurred an “accident” of history that set the terms of European engagement for all French governments and presidents thereafter.

This is convincing history, but some doubts remain. Why, for example, does the *concept* of political union/unity still so feel elusive? Probably because it is a notion so alien to the British experience of European integration; all the more reason, then, to treat it more analytically than is the case here. This work rather expects its readers to accept its premise—that the European union-entity defined as superpower-Europe is a good thing—at face value. For the target readership, predominately students of history operating in the French academic community, this is undoubtedly not a problem; but were there an underlying aim of furthering Franco-British understanding, say, the treatment here of “European political union” is unconvincing. Similarly, how are we to believe the book’s concluding assertion that French governments and presidents over the past sixty years *have* succeeded in making Europe without undoing France? How would we know? Linking the findings here to work on French public opinion and voting behaviour would address this gap.[2] Finally, what are the bold and generous moves that

Bossuat urges on France's current political establishment if they are to influence European unity into the twenty-first century? We need to know these to be convinced by Bossuat's optimism for France in Europe. But on its own terms, this is an excellent read, so much so that the book fell apart in the course of this review exercise and is now a collection of individual, unbound pages.

NOTES

[1] Craig Parsons, *A Certain Idea of Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003).

[2] Such as Chris Flood, "French Euroscepticism and the Politics of Indifference", in Helen Drake, ed., *French Relations with the European Union* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 75-107.

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