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Editorial: The European Union as a Model of Regional Integration

European integration, in its institutional form as the European Union, has attracted admiration in other parts of the world, particularly in Latin America and Southeast Asia. Public opinion in these regions often finds it difficult to believe that such intensive, multidimensional cooperation among 27 states is possible; that it has been endowed with a sophisticated legal framework; that the European Commission has been established as the main administrative body and entrusted with responsibility in key areas (such as trade policy and competition); and that a policy of limited redistribution has been introduced to help narrow developmental disparities.

Viewing European integration “from the outside” underscores that its institutional architecture is worth emulating for small and medium-sized states across different regions of the globe. These countries see tangible benefits in the intensification of trade flows, since only through “market pooling” can their enterprises harness economies of scale and specialisation. They require regulatory harmonisation and collective action to strengthen the digital security of their institutions, businesses, and citizens. While they may not yet be ready to construct a comprehensive system of minimum social protection, they are closely observing the solutions adopted by EU member states.

By acting through common institutions, small and medium-sized states can more effectively shape the conditions under which international trade takes place. This is the aim of the new generation of trade agreements the EU has concluded with major external partners.

Collective action also enables states to contribute to the protection of global commons, including marine resources.

For external observers, it is evident that the foundations of deeper cooperation lie in shared values, cultural proximity, and historical experience. Yet here we encounter the paradox of being perceived from the outside as an area of strong cultural cohesion, while “from within” even the smallest differences and sources of conflict are acutely felt. Shifts in perspective, however, allow us to approach these tensions with greater composure.

It is therefore worthwhile to analyse the experience of European integration by focusing on facts and concrete achievements, while avoiding utopian visions and excessive dramatisation. Equally valuable is recognising the institutional features of the European Union that other regions of the world regard as worthy of adoption.

We invite you to engage with the articles published in this volume which examine European integration and reflect on the lessons it may hold for other regions of the world.

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