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EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: THE HISTORICAL
BACKGROUND
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REPORT

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

I am delighted to be with you in Ljubljana, and to have the opportunity of sharing in this conference today. During the past two years I have had the pleasure of working with historians from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Russia on a Council of Europe project to produce a joint textbook for school students on the history of the South Caucasus. I have also recently spent some time in Tbilisi and Yerevan, though not alas in Baku, working with university historians on the development of history examinations and textbooks for use in secondary schools. And these projects are continuing. For a variety of reasons therefore, the invitation to be here was especially welcome.

As I am sure you will appreciate, in the time available to me it is not possible to do much more than sketch in the broad outlines of the historical background to the issues of European integration. I want, therefore, to try to move quickly over the last couple of centuries or so picking out some of the key areas of contact between the region and Europe. But I would like to start by making three general points.

> (i) Running through the history of Europe, and of those parts of the world that Europe has touched, has been a constant thread of conflict and war. 'European history' as one commentator has portrayed it 'is an almost incessant stream of blood, misery and destruction furthermore, the width and depth of this stream increased with the size and the strength of centrally organised states and with the development of military technology'[1].

> The years of peace that Western Europe and – albeit to a lesser extent - Eastern Europe have enjoyed since the mid-1950s stand in stark contrast to this belligerent past. Within the European Union (EU), military force has ceased to be a viable option; relationships are characterised not only by the absence of war, but also by the absence of the possibility of war among its members. The EU has become, in a term used by Kamppeter and others, a 'peace community'. It is this, as much perhaps as any economic benefits they hope to gain, that attracts would-be members to the EU. Central to the formation of this peace community has been the process of European integration. Arguably, this integration was from the very beginning an essentially political rather than an economic process. Even a body such as the European Coal and Steel Community, the 1951 forerunner to the Treaty of Rome and the EU, had purposes that were pre-eminently political rather than economic.

> (ii) My second general point is that attempts to bring the disparate nations of Europe together have not, of course, been confined to the last fifty years. They have occurred repeatedly ever since the collapse of the Mediterranean-centred Roman Empire in the fifth century AD. The Frankish empire of Charlemagne and the Holy Roman Empire united large areas of the continent under a loose administration for hundreds of years from the ninth century onwards. Once Arab conquerors had seized the ancient centres of Christianity in Syria and Egypt during the eighth century, the concept of a unified Europe became essentially

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[1] Kamppeter Werner, *Lessons of European Integration,* Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Germany, April 2000

synonymous with that of 'Christendom' The idea of a united Christendom, however, was always more of an ideal to be appealed to rather than a reality to drive action; and was rendered even more dubious following the schism between Orthodoxy and Catholicism in 1054.

More pertinent to this present survey was the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453. The following centuries produced frequent calls for Europe to unite against what could be perceived as the common enemy – although on occasion Turkey could also be a convenient ally and relations with the Ottoman Empire remained a key factor in the foreign policies of the European Powers until the 1914-18 War. This is a point to which I will return.

Appeals for the unity of Europe have also often been invoked in the pursuit of purely national ends. Napoleon portrayed himself as the defender of European civilisation and his 'Continental System' of 1806 imposed a kind of supranational economic system on large parts of it. During the First World War, some German and Austrian politicians evoked a vision of 'Central Europe' implying German political and economic hegemony from the Meuse to the Bosporus. In 1943 the Nazi government proposed the creation of a single European economic area of fourteen countries. Although this would in no way have been a democratic union, the proposed structure was in other ways not dissimilar to the present EU.

(iii) And thirdly, in considering the background to European, particularly EU, perspectives and approaches to the Caucasus region, it is important to recognise that there is little history of prolonged interaction between what are now the member states of the Union and the countries of the Caucasus.[2] The seizure of Constantinople had the effect of removing the Caucasus from easy contact – political, economic or cultural – with the countries of Europe. Armenians and Georgians struggled to get their voices heard in Western Europe. When they sought support for their aspirations for national independence they usually came away empty-handed. When they looked to forge lasting links with European states they were generally disappointed.

There were occasions when the region was important to one or other of the European countries: notably, for example, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when the region's oil resources were a major focus of the emerging petroleum industry in Europe and the United States. Wishaw invested English capital in Baku's oil industry. The Swedish Nobels and the French Rothschilds built considerable fortunes drilling wells and constructing railways to carry oil from Baku to Georgian ports on the Black Sea. And, during the First World War there was considerable competition between German, Turkish and British forces for control of the Baku oilfields following the collapse of the Russian Empire. But such moments were a long way from the kind of systematic and long-term interaction that characterised Western Europe's relationship with, say, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the Balkan states. And, even such interaction as there had been disappeared with the consolidation of Soviet Union power along the southern edge of the former Russian Empire from the early 1920s onwards. There was, therefore, little legacy

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[2] MacFarlane, S.Neil, *Caucasus and Central Asia: Towards a Non-Strategy,* Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Occasional Paper Series, No.37, August 2002

of European relations with the countries of the region when they emerged from the USSR as independent states in the early 1990's.

I want to turn now to look at the historical record in a little more detail. During the latter part of the eighteenth century and the whole of the nineteenth century, a significant factor in relationships between the European powers was what western historians have commonly referred to as the 'Eastern Question'. It is used as a collective term for the problems this posed by the growing weakness and disintegration of the Ottoman Turkish Empire and the consequent rivalry over what was to happen to the lands the Ottomans vacated. Two countries especially – Russia and later Austria – were keen to expand at the expense of Turkey; whilst others – notably Britain – were anxious that Russia should not do so. It was their attitudes towards the Eastern question that formed the context for relationships between the countries of Europe and the countries of the Caucasus. And it led to some very odd liaisons: none more so, before it finally ruptured at the end of the 1890s, than that between Britain and Turkey.

The cause of the rupture was the violent treatment meted out by the Sultan, Abdul-Hamid II, to his Armenian subjects. From 1890 onwards the Armenians, convinced not unreasonably that reforms promised by the Sultan would not be carried out unless they had support from foreign powers, agitated in western states for the grant of national independence. The events that followed the failure to gain this support provoked loud protests – at least in some parts of Europe – but a marked silence on the possibility of taking any firm action. Britain was finally alienated from Turkey; but Britain's supporting role was promptly taken up by Germany.

This alignment of the powers continued into the war of 1914, Turkey allying with Germany and Austria-Hungary, and Russia joining France and Britain. The war was to change geo-political alignments in many parts of the world. In the Caucasus it was to lead to the collapse of the two great empires of Russia and Turkey that had dominated the region for over a hundred years and an opportunity for independence for the first time for many centuries – although an opportunity that was to prove short-lived.

When the war ended in November 1918, the countries of the South Caucasus – along with others whose imperial masters had been on the losing side - had high hopes of Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States and chairman of the Paris peace conference. Before the war ended Wilson had drawn up his 'Fourteen Points' for the creation of a better, more peaceful world. Amongst the most prominent of these was the right of 'self-determination': the right of all national groups to decide where they wanted to live and to rule themselves. This was to be applied in the near east as much as in Europe. The United States sent a fifty-strong delegation to the area boundaries were mapped out; and it was envisaged that Armenia for example; would be led towards full independence by becoming a United States 'mandate'.

All of this came to naught, however, when not only the new government of Turkey but also – and more significantly – the United States Senate – refused to ratify the 1920 Treaty of Sevres. The Senate refused to commit the United States to the kind of world peace-keeping role that Wilson had in mind. Relations with the West had once more ended in disappointment. Within a year the South Caucasus was again subject to outside rule. Unable to act independently, its relationship with Europe was now determined by its place within the USSR.

Faced by the catastrophe of the First World War, the idea of a politically unified Europe was floated once more. In 1923, the Austrian Count Coudenhove-Kalergi founded the Pan-Europa Movement and hosted the first Pan-European Congress in Vienna in 1926. In 1929, Aristide Briand, the French Prime Minister, spoke to the League of Nations Assembly in which he proposed the idea of a federation of European nations based on solidarity and in the pursuit of economic prosperity and political and social co-operation. Briand presented a memorandum on the possible organisation of a system of European Federal Union in 1930. In 1931 the French politician Edouard Herriot published a book which he entitled *The United States of Europe*. But the economic disaster of the Great Depression, the rise of fascism in Europe and the Second World War, following a mere 20 years after the ending of the first one, strictly limited the success of this inter-war movement for European integration. It was in any case a movement that largely excluded, although for different reasons, not only the USSR but also Britain.

What set the stage for the efforts to integrate Western Europe after 1945 was that state of affairs that we call the Cold War.[3] The coalition of the USA and the USSR did not survive the war. The ideologies and the economic and strategic interests of the two powers were too conflicting for it to last. Viewed from Washington, the possible economic and political collapse of Western Europe could have made it an easy prey for Stalin. So dangerous did the situation in Europe seem in the immediate aftermath of the war that for the United States the development of a strong European economy was an urgent priority and in June 1947 the Marshall Plan, designed to aid economic recovery, was launched.

This objective, the economic and military reconfiguration of Western Europe as a part of an anti-Soviet alliance, required some sort of a union between the countries concerned. But, realistically, American policy saw an effective alliance as also depending on renewed German economic strength and on the re-arming of Germany within NATO. The economic recovery of Germany and its potential military contribution to Western defence as vital to the European, and by extension, world balance.[4]

It was a policy that was bound to meet with opposition not only from the USSR but also from both Britain and France. Not surprisingly, for the governments of these countries, as well as for many other Europeans, the idea of a remilitiarised and economically strong Germany was a deeply unwelcome prospect. What guarantees were there that German economic and military prowess would not again menace Europe at some point in the future as it had done in the past? Meeting the perceived strategic needs of the Cold War on the one hand, and resolving the 'German problem' on the other hand became a major American dilemma and, ultimately, the impetus behind moves towards European integration.

The approach that was adopted towards resolving the dilemma, one of reconciliation and co-operation among the Western European countries, had been proposed by Winston Churchill in a speech at the University of Zürich in 1946. A peaceful Europe could not be based on feelings of hate and vengeance. Instead it required trust among the European peoples, and, echoing Herriot, a sort of 'United States of Europe'. As a first step, a partnership between Germany and France ought to be formed. The reconciliation of these two countries was a necessary condition for a united and internally peaceful Western Europe.

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[3] Kamppeter, op.cit.,p7
[4] Hobsbawm, Eric, *Age of Extremes*: *The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, Penguin, London, 1994

Achieving all of this was to take a further 10 years. Achieving wider integration was to take much longer. If it was the existence of the Cold War that created the necessary conditions for the initial integration embodied in the 1957 Treaty of Rome and the European Union, it was the ending of the Cold War that made possible the expansion of the integration ideal.

I began with three points. I want to end with three brief observations:

(i)   Events in the Caucasus appear set to continue, as they have in the past, to have a discernable influence on relationships between the countries of Europe – and beyond: witness, for example, the impact of Russia's response in Chechnya and the difficulties over the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty in the first half of the 1990s.

(ii)   Recent discussions about the entry of Turkey into the EU have refuelled previous debates about just what is meant by 'Europe' and how far the idea of a 'European' Union should be extended.[5] How do we define Europe – geographically, politically, culturally or in some other way? Such debate is not new. Given the lack of any natural frontier separating Europe and Asia, the dividing line between the two continents has been largely a matter of convention. And since classical times convention seems to have been moving it steadily eastwards.

(iii)   And, finally, although acknowledging that drawing lessons from the past can be a dangerous thing for historians to do, I would like to offer a quotation from Jean Monnet, widely regarded as the chief architect of European unity post-1945. For the achievement of integration, he wrote:

'The fundamental principle is the delegation of sovereignty in a limited but decisive area ... Co-operation among nations, as important as it may be, does not solve anything. What ought to be sought is a fusion of the interests ... and not simply the maintenance of the balance of these interests[6]...

John Hamer

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[5] See, for example, Kremer, Martin, *The EU and the Challenge of Defining its External Boundaries*, European Foreign affairs Review, 31 March 2000.
[6] Monnet, Jean, *Memoires*, Librairie Fayard, Paris, 1976