

# Past, Present, and Future



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**E**xamining the past 20 years of the European Union (EU) is no easy feat, nor is evaluating the success of the recent members. Two decades is not enough, but it is sufficiently long to give a good overview of where the EU stands today and what lessons can be drawn from the integration process. Yet, this process is ongoing, so no final conclusions can be made. This, however, is not surprising given how the whole EU is a dynamically changing project.

In this issue of the *4liberty.eu Review*, the authors come from various countries that joined the European Union at different times. The contributors themselves come from different backgrounds, belong to different generations, and thus their experiences are engagingly diverse. The countries in focus also have very different histories. Most of them were ravaged by communism, whereas some even by war, not long before their EU memberships. They managed to make swift and seemingly successful changes toward liberal values, democracy, and free markets on their own, spurred on by the strong aspiration to rejoin their places in Europe, of which EU membership is symbolic.

Although these states managed to have these great accomplishments on their own, they greatly benefitted further by their membership of the European Union. Not everything lies in the numbers though. People of these countries wanted their freedoms back and worked hard to unite again with their brethren in Western Europe.

Now, there are populist forces in the EU, not content with all the achievements. They paint a grim but false picture of what sort of awful policies the European Union has forced upon the members. The EU needs to be criticized to make it ever better. There is no denying that there are faults. Yet, without it, the recent members would be much

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worse off. Furthermore, there is no *us* and *them*. We are the EU. The member states and their citizens. Therefore, the decisions made are not the fault of some abstract entity, but a fault of our own.

In light of these phenomena, this issue of the *4liberty.eu Review* provides a glimpse into the story of the hard work people put into joining the EU, the great benefits of the membership, and the dangers of populist voices wishing to weaken the European project. The articles in this issue can, therefore, serve as an aid for the EU and applicant states in drawing up a roadmap for future candidacy, factoring in all the past errors, future opportunities, and current attitudes.

I hope you enjoy reading them.

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