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Q4(c)

Do you agree with the view that the EU has thus far proved to be the most successful experiment in the regional integration processes? Account for its successes and also some of the recent challenges that it is faced with.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · Comparative Politics

Comparative Politics: Nature and major approaches; political economy and political sociology perspectives; limitations of the comparative method.

Core demand of the question

- State why the EU is compared as the deepest regional integration
- **Account for successes:** peace, market, law, mobility, enlargement
- **Account for recent challenges:** Brexit, rule of law, migration, war, energy, debt
- **Verdict:** most successful experiment, not an unblemished one

Revision summary

- **The EU is the deepest regional integration:** single market, supranational law, euro for many, Schengen and enlargement conditionality.

Success is clearest against ASEAN, SAARC, Mercosur and NAFTA/USMCA in legal depth and peace among former enemies.

- **Challenges:** Brexit, Hungarian and Polish rule-of-law conflicts, migration splits, Russia's war and energy shock, and incomplete fiscal union.

NATO still holds the hard-security core.

- **Verdict:** most successful experiment so far, under a live stress test of political consent.

Introduction

- **Regional integration is a crowded field: ASEAN, African Union, Mercosur, USMCA, SAARC.** The claim that the **European Union** has so far been the **most successful experiment** is **justified** if success means depth of law, market and peace among former enemies. The same answer must **account for recent challenges**, or it becomes a brochure.

Body**Successes**

The EU turned a coal-and-steel bargain among states that had destroyed each other twice in a century into a **single market**, a dense body of **directly effective law**, a **Court of Justice**, and, for many members, a **single currency**. **Schengen** made internal movement ordinary. Repeated **enlargement** spread democratic conditionality to Southern and then Eastern Europe. No other regional body has pooled so much **regulatory sovereignty** or produced so much intra-regional trade as a share of members' lives. In the language of question 2(b), it is the home of the post-modern state. Compared with ASEAN's informal consensus or SAARC's

freeze, the EU is a **legal community**, not only a meeting calendar.

Peace among France and Germany is the foundational success. The euro, for all its faults, is a political fact that NAFTA never attempted. Global standard-setting - data protection, chemicals, digital markets - gives the EU power beyond its military weight.

Recent challenges

Brexit was the first major secession. It showed that pooling is reversible and that identity politics can defeat market logic. **Rule-of-law fights with Hungary and Poland exposed a gap: the Union has tools against backsliding, and it uses them slowly.** **Migration** after 2015 split front-line and interior states and revived internal borders. **Russia's war** on Ukraine ended the cheap-energy model and forced a security debate that NATO still dominates, which is the limit of EU strategic autonomy. **Debt and inflation** after the euro crisis and COVID strained North-South solidarity; joint borrowing was a step, not a finished federal treasury. Enlargement toward Ukraine and the Western Balkans will test absorption again.

These challenges are **serious**. They have not dissolved the single market or the Court. Success is therefore **comparative and incomplete**.

Verdict

- **Yes:** the EU remains the most successful regional integration experiment in depth and in transforming interstate war into domestic-style law. No: it is not a finished federation, and the 2010s-2020s have been a stress test of consent. Other regions should copy **institutions and law**, not a fantasy of frictionless identity.

Flow diagram

European Union -> Peace market law euro
European Union -> Brexit rule of law migration
Brexit rule of law migration -> Ukraine energy debt
Peace market law euro -> Most successful comparatively
Ukraine energy debt -.stresses. -> Most successful comparatively

Conclusion

The EU's successes are peace among historic enemies, a single market, supranational law and a currency union for many members. Recent challenges - Brexit, rule of law, migration, war and fiscal strain - show the limits of consent. As a regional experiment it is still first in class. It is not beyond examination.

Facts & figures

Brexit 2020

United Kingdom left the EU, the first major secession from the integration project.

Direct effect

EU law binds individuals and firms through national courts - a depth no other regional body matches.

Euro crisis to NextGenerationEU

Sovereign-debt stress showed incomplete fiscal union; joint borrowing after COVID was a partial reply.

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