

***Christopher Booker and Richard North:
The Great Deception. The Secret History
of the European Union
(Skryté dějiny evropské integrace
od roku 1918 do současnosti)***

Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2006, 624 pages, ISBN: 80-7364-026-0.

The reviewed book of the authors Christopher Booker and Richard North *The Great Deception: Can the European Union Survive? (Skryté dějiny evropské integrace od roku 1918 do současnosti)* is a rather interesting publication in the Czech environment as it takes a strongly anti-European stance. Christopher Booker is a British journalist well-known for his anti-European Union columns, particularly for the *Sunday Telegraph*. Richard North is a British economist and works as a consultant to the British government on European issues. They attempt to defend the thesis that the whole project of European integration has, since its early days, had the hidden objective of creating a European political union, forming a United States of Europe. To achieve this goal its proponents adopted the necessary principle that the true character and purpose cannot be articulated openly to the European public. The authors claim that the current state of integration has reached a point where this hidden agenda cannot be held secret anymore. The authors present an extensive work built on detailed research work. However, they choose a rather selective approach highlighting the negative sides of European integration on the nation state, particularly the United Kingdom (UK). As such, the book is quite useful in seeing the eurosceptic view of the entire process of European integration.

The book is logically divided into 22 chapters, from the birth of the idea of integrating Europe until the failure of the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005, which was missing in the original English edition of the book and was extended last year. This revised edition was translated into Czech. Particularly the introductory chapters of the book that focus on the path towards the creation of the European Community from 1918 to 1958 brings new light to what is generally considered well-known facts. The authors' comprehensive research destroys many clichés. They often go to the very root of the events, which might at first seem rather redundant and may appear to the reader to have little links with the integration but eventually lead to the presentation of the real building blocks and alternative forms of European integration. For instance, they document that the true basis of the European Coal and Steel Community lies in the idea of the French industrialist Louis Louchet, who was authorized by the French government in 1916 to reform and develop French production base (p. 24–25). This part also presents non-glorified profiles of the “founding fathers” of the European Union, such as Jean Monnet, Robert Schumann, and Henri Spaak. A rather extensive amount of space is dedicated to Jean Monnet and his footprints in

the process of forming and leading the movement supporting the integration of European states. Booker and North try to introduce the reader with an earthbound evaluation of their contribution to the project. They also dedicate a large amount of their attention to the backstage negotiations. The first part of the book is, thus, rather enriching for every reader, who has a good background in EU history and always suspected the authors of leaving some important facts out.

The remaining chapters that describe the history of European integration and the path to the Constitutional treaty are the backbone for Booker and North's argument that the entire project has had a hidden agenda kept secret from their public. Many of the presented views are based on detailed research and open new areas of discussion on the development of European integration. Nonetheless, the selective approach greatly damages the final impression from the book. First of all, the authors concentrate solely on the UK. There are many common traits among the member states but their experience also differs. Booker and North neglect other countries unless they are somehow related to the issues of British membership. A well-balanced evaluation of the British experience would be valuable once the title is changed so that the reader would know what the content of the book is. However, the book does not present an objective view of the 33 years of British membership either. The authors focus on the negative implications for the UK and their arguments are often quite populist. For example, they argue that the regional policy originally provided small amounts of financial resources for the UK. That is true but denies the fact the European Regional and Development Fund was founded in 1975 in response to British membership and was aimed at targeting specific problems of British regional development. Another example is their claim that the tax system the European Community introduced in 1967 was the most bureaucratic in the world. The EU tax system applies to only select elements of the national tax systems, those that are directly related to the correct function of the single market (customs union in 1967). Consequently, it is an overstatement – to say the least – to make such claim (without stating that Mister Booker and North are unlikely to have knowledge of all tax systems in the world). Such unfortunate statements give the reader the feeling that it should be read with caution and as an expression of one view on European integration rather than a well-balanced academic source.

The lack of objectiveness unfortunately lowers the quality of the book, whose scope is remarkable. Going into so much detail results not only in slowly boring the reader who might then skip over some of the important parts of the chapters, but the text often lacks analysis and becomes rather descriptive. Given the amount of work the authors spent conducting research for this work, a more analytical approach would be expected if not only the general but also the academic public was the targeted audience.

The language and structure of the book are very lucid and comprehensible for the wide public but it is also suitable for the academic community as it brings many new views. The authors made use of many disclosed materials that were not available earlier and help to modify and contribute to our knowledge of the EU. However, we have to keep in mind the eurosceptic

background of the authors, which becomes obvious in the language used, for instance The Milan pitfall (*milánská léčka*, page 255), or the French cheerfully announced that they would once more violate the budget rules in 2005 (“[...] *IFrancouzil* vesele oznámili, že v roce 2005 rozpočtová pravidla opět poruší”).

There are some factual mistakes too. For example, the authors claim that Poland, Hungary and Romania belonged to the inter-war period democracies, which is a very simplified view. They state that thousands died in the 1956 Hungarian uprising (page 111) while the death toll was never officially set and ranges from 120 to 2700. The authors also say that the population of Turkey is 90 million (page 504), which is rather exaggerated given its 70 million. The book also suffers from the above-mentioned one-sided arguments that highlight the negative sides of integration, while ignoring the positive effects of EU membership, including the UK.

The Czech edition has a foreword written by Hynek Fajmon, Czech Member of the European Parliament for the Civic Democratic Party. Apart from short references to the book, he attempts to characterise the Czech path to the EU. Apart from criticising the conditions for Czech farmers under the Common agricultural policy, and the 2002–2006 coalition governments of social democrats, Christian democrats and liberals, Mr Fajmon says that the media and other important social actors created a situation where every decent person must support Czech entry into the EU. Such claim can sound rather confusing when applied to a country as the Czech Republic that has one of the highest rates of euroscepticism among all EU member states. Mr. Fajmon also argues that the EU reminds us of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* where all animals are equal but some are more equal than others. However, any standard textbook of European integration would show that the new member states have always had a somewhat different status than the incumbent states. Thus, such things should not be neglected if we want to give the general public a well-balanced information about the EU. It is true that the Czechs have not been granted access to most of the old member states' labour markets. However, will the Czech public not demand the same for Turkey once it enters the EU? Will Mr. Fajmon then argue that such a step would be discriminatory and oppose it?

The more than 600 pages of the book present the reader with an informative text. Both europhiles and eurosceptics, the general and academic public will find it useful and relevant. The thorough research, documented with a large amount of quotes, lucid language, and an excellent translation make it worth reading. On the other hand, the reader should keep in mind that the authors are often very populist and the book lacks objectivism. It is not surprising that it is praised by eurosceptics in Europe as the most significant book ever written on the European Union. For these reasons I recommend to read the book if the reader wants to learn how eurosceptics view European integration but not if he/she is looking for an objective informative source.

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