The 1970s are usually remembered as a lost decade for European integration. Though the Common Commercial Policy began to emerge as from 1970 and the EC in 1973 enjoyed its first enlargement, it remained constrained by powerful French anti-Community policies, which as vestiges of Gaullism both on the right and the left remained wedded to the pursuit of narrow national interests. Both stubbornly advocated and pursued statist approaches to counteract the forces of Europeanization and incipient globalization. The Arab boycott policies and the energy crises of 1974 and 1978 left the Europeans infamously in disarray and scrambling for national deals. Also, weakened by the defeat and the costs of waging war in Indochina the US had withdrawn their erstwhile support for the European project, first under Nixon/Kissinger managing to divide the Europeans with their anti OPEC agitation and later under Carter/Brzezinski to unite them with their anti-Soviet sanction policies. Further the Commission during the decade was led by singularly weak presidents from Malfatti to Roy Jenkins (the latter was soon more absorbed by planning his political comeback in the UK. Among them Sicco Mansholt (an interim president of eight months during 1972) is featured in a short and interesting profile in the volume, sketching his conversion from a pragmatic agricultural reformer towards an ineffectual zero growth and Third World advocate, which illustrates the intellectual climate of the times.

From the 17 contributions in this well-structured and well edited volume almost counterintuitive a much more differentiated picture emerges. Almost unperceptively – and mainly thanks to German, Dutch, Commission and later UK initiatives – there was a gradual and often painfully slow progress towards a more responsive and global EC foreign policy on many fronts, in the course of the decade eventually overcoming the French controlled initial parochial EC focus on Francophone Africa and the Southern Mediterranean. The global environment – then as now – had the persistent habit of preventing the Europeans to indulge in their favourite pastime, namely to indulge self-referentially in their own stew. External shocks served well to instil a sense of crisis and policy inadequacy and hence were ultimately helpful to trigger attempts at policy coordination, joint ad hoc responses and eventually initiatives for systemic joint policies. These global triggers were notably the threats towards the détente policies after the Polish crackdown and the Soviet invasion of
Afghanistan, the pressure emanating from the North-South Dialogue for expanded EC development tools and a broader regional scope, the oil crises, the democratization of Spain, Portugal and Greece, the emergence of Japan as a commercial rival, of ASEAN as a potential regional partner and the Chinese wish for diplomatic representations, monetary turmoil following the Nixon shocks of suspending the gold convertibility of the US $ and of imposing import surcharges, US pressure to set up an energy consumers agency as a counterweight to OPEC, as well as UN mediated pressures for coherent responses to ever more pressing environmental and resource constraints as well as the then topical discussion of the »limits to growth« triggered by the Club of Rome. These valuable studies – backed up by impressive archive work (which following the 30 years’ rule is now possible for all relevant national and EC actors for the period in question) – now show convincingly that far from being a lost decade, during the 1970s the necessary groundwork was laid for Jacques Delors’ exceptionally successful presidency starting in 1985 and the advent of the Single Market.

As Claudia Hiepel points out in her introduction, the 1970s may more correctly be considered a conflictuous decade of economic, political, social and mental transformation ending the post-war year in Europe, leading to the CSCE induced erosion of the Eastern bloc and paving the way towards our current age of globalization (p. 10). This secular tendency, according to the evidence presented by the authors, strengthened Europe’s integration rather than weakening it. The EC’s assertion to be an international actor essentially started with The Hague summit in 1969 and against all odds was painstakingly solidified and substantiated in the subsequent years. All the small but increasingly systematic steps of increased Community policy cooperation and coordination cumulatively then enabled major later initiatives like the Internal market and Currency union.

The volume is based on contributions for a conference of contemporary European historians held in 2012. Its major themes cover West Europeans responses to the threats to détente, to North South relations, to the rise of Asia, to international monetary turmoil, the oil crisis and the new environmental awareness. In relations to the Soviet Union and her satellites the EC, according to Angela Romano, through increased economic interdependence and the CSCE process managed to leverage this notably in the essential »third basket« in terms of human contacts and flows of information and ideas. With bilateral agreements with Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Romania (which all suffered from worsening terms of trade for Soviet oil and gas) the EC successfully exploited the splits exposed in the Soviet empire, without however appearing as threatening (p. 38) and without ever recognizing the Comecon. The EC’s coherence was also facilitated by US unilateralism, that is the European joint opposition
to hard line US foreign policy under Jimmy Carter following the imposition of martial law in Poland 1982, as Sara Tavani argues. In order to safeguard détente in Europe coordinated through EPC already in December 1980 EC member states supplied aid packages to prop up the bankrupt regime in Warsaw (p. 52) and earlier in summer 1980 dissuaded the Carter administration from taking pre-emptive military measures against a »potential« Soviet invasion of Poland (p. 55).

The European internal position was not without contradictions as Veronika Heyde demonstrates with reference to French policies, which in fact lived well with the Cold war which kept Germany (and Europe) divided and allowed leeway for a Gaullist semi-independent mediating role, thus maximizing her political weight as a medium power (pp. 69). At the same time by 1975 Paris did not wish to be left out of détente and employed its considerable soft power in cultural exchanges with East (p. 72). This allowed for a modus vivendi with the Soviets and at the same time encouraged avenues for reform in Eastern Europe. Occasionally French attempts at appeasement (like by President Giscard at the Belgrade CSCE meeting in 1978) were uncoordinated with her European partners and ended in failure (p.77). Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 however, France realized the limits of unilateral accommodation and joined the European consensus in condemning the aggression (p. 87). On the German side, similarly Helmut Schmidt, an Atlanticist by inclination, was pushed by events and US policies towards European coordination, EPC consultations and first attempts at German/French defence cooperation in order to safeguard détente, which he saw threatened in Europe, and prevent looming US military disengagement (Wilfried Loth, p. 89).

Also in the field of development policies and North South relations the 1970s brought a major realignment from the EC’s inherited late/post–colonial African orientation of the Treaties of Rome. Not only were its development policies criticized as being too slow, untransparent and inefficient – and this not for the first and the last time – and new and improved policies were promised (Lili Reyels, p. 115). Originally the EC’s ODA was conceived as a French chasse gardée as an integral part of her African policies with French commissioners inevitably in charge (much like Germans for competition policies). At the time a lot of whining concerned the fluctuating export revenues of developing agricultural commodity exporters, somehow implying that terms of trade could only deteriorate for them (which of course was nonsense). Following its dirigiste tradition the EC – against German and Dutch reservations – duly complied by setting up a generous Stabex scheme for discretionary spending by the recipient regime to compensate them (p. 121). At UK pressure in a »sugar protocol« generous internal EC sugar prices were later also extended to Caribbean cane sugar exporters to the EC,
Britain’s erstwhile colonial suppliers (Guia Migani, p. 130). Whether these payments ever did any good (except for the bank accounts for the local power holders), remains a closely guarded secret. In 1975 the Lome Convention with unilateral preferential access to the EC replaced the earlier Convention of Association with French speaking Africa, which had provided for a Eurafrican free trade area (p. 123). Other African countries were progressively included, notably after the UK’s accession.

The first enlargement increased pressure to expand the EC’s narrow developmental focus on Africa ultimately to the entire third world, a position long advocated by Germany and the Netherlands (p. 127). At this time international agitation for a »New International Economic Order«, sponsored by UNCTAD, was in full swing which lent intellectual backing for schemes like Stabex and for the Arab oil boycotts. The successor agreement Lome II in 1979 in addition created a new fund, called Sysmin, to compensate mineral exporters for their export earnings fluctuations, this time earmarked to benefit the mining sector proper, reflecting the dogmatic belief of the times that public funds were preferable to private investments (p. 143).

Indeed the two oil crises of the 1970s were preceded and accompanied by the nationalization of the oil industries in the major producing countries, including the British National Oil Company managing North Sea oil in 1974 (Guiliano Garavini, p. 149). As a first foreign policy reaction they triggered the formal start of the Euro-Med dialogue in 1974 and the completion of eight cooperation agreements with Southern Mediterranean partners by 1977. This was accompanied by a significant pro-Arab shift by all EC countries, except the Netherlands, culminating in the 1980 EC Venice declaration on the »legitimate rights of the Palestinians«. Further, President Giscard stated the North South Dialogue as a new talk shop (p. 154). This covered also consumer/producer consultations on oil and other commodity prices. By 1981 this »dialogue window« was closed by the new Thatcher government, which privatized the entire UK energy sector and began to under-price OPEC systematically. While still scrambling for cheaper national oil imports most EC members (except for France) in 19774 succumbed to US pressure to set up the International Energy Agency as an oil consumer organization. President Nixon and Henry Kissinger managed to divide their European counterparts by threatening a total revision of US European policies. They had originally been opposed to any anti-OPEC organization and had wished to collaborate with the oil producers (Henning Türk, p. 361). As a face saving device the IEA was then placed under the OECD umbrella and made subject to the organization’s unanimity rule – including the French vote with the Commission as an observer.

A further step on the EC’s piecemeal road towards global foreign relations was done towards the Southern Mediterranean. It started with the fateful association agreements with Greece
(1961) and Turkey (1963), but was subsequently blocked by France insisting on exclusively national relations with the Maghreb countries and by Italy which was fearful agricultural competition (Elena Calandri, p. 166), whilst Germany only favoured the Northern shores (Greece, Turkey and Spain). This during 1975–1978 resulted in an incoherent patchwork of different agreements with countries seemingly sharing similar economic structures and wishing to export the same agricultural and labour intensive products like textiles and shoes to the EC’s market. At the initiative of Foreign Minister Aldo Moro who was worried about radical Arab regimes and reduced US influence, in 1971 the new EPC was tasked to deal with the »Southern question« (p. 170). France under President Pompidou, allied with the Commission’s bureaucratic interests, however managed to safeguard the priority of the African associates. US displeasure and French opposition scaled down the dialogue within the EPC by 1974 to deal exclusively with the Northern shores. They at the time were in turmoil with Spain and Portugal democratizing, and Greece being faced with the Turkish invasion of neighbouring Cyprus. Interestingly the Mediterranean accession question also produced a schism among Socialist parties in Europe. While Spanish and Portuguese Social democrats were passionately in favour of joining, the Greek socialist-nationalist PASDK was opposed. So were the French Socialists – then allied with the Communists in these countries –, in difference to German (and Swedish) social democrats who consistently sympathetic. The UK Labour government under Harold Wilson in 1975 was even prepared to arm democrats in Portugal against a feared Communist putsch (Bernd Roether, p. 188). In contrast, the Mitterrand government, originally pursuing a soon failing concept of »nation state socialism« in a sovereign France for years remained difficult on Spanish and Portuguese accession and insisted the Germany should pay for the agricultural costs this would entail (p. 192).

In the Far East the EC after years of mutual benign neglect in the post-war era in a rude awakening was confronted with the rise of Asia, which in the 1970s was exclusively limited to sectorally focused Japanese export offensives. Following the oil crisis and US-Japanese trade frictions Japanese exports were suddenly diverted to the utterly unprepared and unexpected EC market. A residual patchwork of national safeguards, notably in Italy and France, handicapped the CCP, which was supposed to start in 1970, almost from the beginning (Hiromi Suzuki, p. 205). The Commission also suffered from a serious shortage of primary economic and political analysis and contacts on Japan, which in 1974 led to the opening to a small Delegation in Tokyo, which originally was conceived as an information post mainly (p. 211). A sense of trade crisis ensued when by 1975 also Germany was sufficiently irritated by Japan’s neo-mercantilist export drive to threaten to join the EC’s protectionist camp. After considerable Commission-Japan negotiations by 1978 however it
become more probable that the EC’s focus would rather be on market access in Japan, and less so on Japanese export restraints (p. 221). Difficult to imagine today, but also EC ministerial level meetings with ASEAN – harmless high level talk shops and photo opportunities in fact – were originally bedevilled with difficulty. Tomoya Kuroda documents that this was essentially due to French resistance in the 1970s. It only came about in 1978 after France realized that after the Communist takeover in Indochina in 1975 (and Vietnam firmly in the Soviet camp) her cherished neutral role in the region had become obsolete and gave in to German and British pressure for a ministerial conference in the context of a US-China rapprochement (p. 233). When China, emerging from the self-inflicted isolation and immolation of the Cultural Revolution, by 1972 ventured her request for diplomatic recognition and representation, in 1975 the PRCh after Yugoslavia became the second Communist country to be accredited by an ambassador in Brussels. Good relations with China were then seen as a balancing factor towards the Soviet Union (Marie Julie Chenard, p. 266), and vice versa. Again there was initial French opposition, but then EPC coordination but also the public views of the EP carried the day (p. 270).

Similarly it was external impulses – the sudden delinking of the US exchange rate during the Nixon shocks as well as, for instance, UN environmental initiatives in the 1970s which almost forced a reticent EC to respond – foremost with initiatives by the Commission and the more integration minded member states (Germany, Benelux and the UK) – with domestic EC policies which in turn created a substantial global relations role for the Community in these policy areas.

In conclusion, this high readable volume in spite of its size and unlike many edited conference papers makes fascinating and instructive reading. Not in the least because it is essentially and documented on authoritative primary sources, which after all makes a huge difference.