

Preface

All researches carried out within the framework of this project aimed at investigating the origins and evolution of an alleged “European model” in the post-World War II international system. Participants discussed two interrelated aspects: the intra-European dimension and the external relations of the European Communities/Union. The first dimension was studied by focusing on the most relevant EC/EU policies, i.e. environmental policy, gender, education, development and cooperation. With regard to the second aspect – the EC/EU external relations – the focus has been on the international dimension of the European integration process: the way the EC/EU has fostered its image and interacted with other states and non-state actors; the channels through which it has developed and promoted its supposedly peculiar “model”.

The goal of the research was twofold. First, it aimed at historicizing the notion of the “European model”. The second purpose was to weave a historical narrative capable also of addressing present-day concerns, including economic recession, environmental change, challenges to national identity, changing relations with the neighborhood regions, global economic order, globalization. The lack of a timely and coherent response to the euro crisis, as well as the more general state of crisis of most national European economies and societies, have seemed to call into question the integrity, validity, if not very meaning of such “European model”, within the borders of the European Union and beyond them. While most scholars appear to agree on this conclusion, interpretations have varied as to the causes of such a crisis. Some contributions have stretched the critique further and even questioned the very existence of a specific “European model”.