Institutionalized cooperation between states is considered to have a civilizing effect on the participants. If relations develop along stable institutional and organizational lines, all those involved benefit from reliable information and interpretation concerning the views and purposes of the others. This diminution in uncertainty fosters trust and encourages the mutual development of images of the self and the other, as well as the socialization of behavioral norms. Add to that the fact that institutionalized cooperation between states favors the emergence of mutual dependencies, which benefits all concerned.

However, cooperation can make the world a safer and more peaceful place only if it represents the sole permitted form of interaction and conflict resolution between states; in other words, if war is ruled out as an instrument of international politics. Today, we hold this – at least as a doctrine – to be self-evident. But we should not forget that the use of military force as a foreign policy tool was outlawed only a few decades ago, in the middle of the twentieth century in the UN Charter, in response to two world wars, which wrought untold suffering.

The European Union was understood from the outset as a peace project. Whatever their differences, the founding fathers of European integration were united by the desire to ensure that future conflicts of interest be resolved without resorting to the traditional apparatus of power politics backed by military force. Concepts such as the balance of power and deterrence were to be rendered obsolete without further ado. Motives of peace – alongside power political ones – undoubtedly also played a role in the EU's eastern enlargement. The formula »integration = peace«, »lack of integration = risk of conflict« has long been a European article of faith.

Nevertheless, in the heart of Europe and, even more so, on its periphery lie dormant inter-state conflicts of considerable potency. This is not confined to the still unresolved remnants of problems arising from the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of multi-ethnic Yugoslavia. Relations between NATO partners Greece and Turkey are also fraught with serious conflict potential. Since the end of World War Two, the two countries have come to the brink of war on several occasions. The gravest crisis arose when the ruling »Colonels'« junta backed a coup against President Makarios of Cyprus, as a result of which Turkey occupied northern Cyprus. In the 1970s, the conflict shifted to the Aegean. Oil exploration in disputed areas threatened, on a number of occasions, to spill over into armed engagement.

In this issue of INTERNATIONAL POLITICS AND SOCIETY, former Prime Minister of Greece Kostas Simitis offers an exclusive insight into the development of deliberations in the Greek government during and after the crisis, which concerned a few uninhabited rocky islets, which the Greeks call Imia and the Turks call Kardak. Needless to say, the fact that there were also voices strongly urging military measures was not a peculiarly Greek phenomenon. However, Prime Minister Simitis would have nothing to do with this, committing himself to a patient strategy of Europeanizing the conflict by means of a classic negotiation-based approach. Without Europe's institutionalized cooperation mechanisms, however, the conflicting parties might have found it difficult to extricate themselves from a spiral of escalation.

Hans-Jürgen Urban – a high-ranking official of IG Metall – also draws lessons from the past, but prompted by the fact that the trade union movement finds itself at something of a crossroads. In Urban's view, European integration is progressively undermining social standards and eroding trade union influence. In the face of this, the trade unions can no longer afford to maintain their naïve pro-Europeanism. A strategic reorientation of trade union policy towards Europe is urgently required.

The relationship between nation states and the Union has always been a sensitive issue with regard to European integration. In Germany, the Constitutional Court has a hand in shaping this relationship. Robert Chr. Van Ooyen takes a look at the Constitutional Court's Lisbon Decision, which is often presented as pro-European. In fact, this judgment remains in thrall to the supreme court's statist, rather liberal-conservative, political stance. Nation state, sovereignty, and democracy are understood as mutually dependent and imposed as a framework on the integration process by means of the distinction between a confederation of states based on international law and a constitutional federal state.

Also in this issue: Friedrich Buttler explains how the universalization of basic social security, regardless of a country's level of development, can be set in motion; Götz Neuneck analyzes what makes up the »Global Zero« nuclear disarmament initiative, how it is gathering momentum, and what its prospects of success are; and Jürgen Bätz shows that Iran's domestic turmoil is weakening it on the foreign policy front.