

The Possibilities of a European Identity

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THE TERMS *EUROPE* AND *EUROPEAN* are often used as collective expressions as in “Europe versus America” or “the European diplomatic initiative in the Middle East.” It is increasingly clear that such expressions entail more than the notion of a lifeless aggregate of countries acting independently of one another. Rather, the term *Europe* signifies a level of organization at least somewhat distinct from the motives and actions of component states. Europe is thought of as a unified, distinct entity that is able to exercise agency in confronting challenges and opportunities in the rest of the world from the Middle East to the United States.

Yet far from being a unified, distinct entity, Europe is a large and complex place. The European Commission’s map shows at least 34 European countries, 25 of which are in the European Union (EU). This group of 34 countries does not include Turkey, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, or the micro-states of Andorra, San Marino, and the Vatican City. A comprehensive list approaches 40 states. Europe is often described as a geographic unit like the continents of Asia, Africa, and North and South America. But on a map, Europe appears as a relatively minor extension of the Eurasian land mass, small in comparison to Russia, Central Asia, and China.

Where Europe begins and ends is a mystery. To answer this question we look to history, politics, demographics, and culture as well as geography. De Gaulle spoke of a Europe ranging “from the Atlantic to the Urals.” Yet even the present-day EU, which has expanded eastward beyond anyone’s wildest expectation, does not extend to the Urals.

Europe cannot be defined simply in terms of member states. Politically, culturally, and economically, Europe is a multi-level phenomenon. Beneath De Gaulle’s *Europe des États* (Europe of States), there is a subnational Europe of regions—Calabria, Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna, and Tuscany in Italy alone. Above the states, there is a

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supranational Europe—the EU, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe. Before the end of the cold war, the Warsaw Treaty Organization, the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance, and the European Free Trade Association (which still exists today in truncated form) would all have been considered in this category.

The question of European identity can never be answered solely from a description of Europe's constituent units. Knowing who is a member of the EU or the larger European region does not tell us whether a European identity exists. Membership in a political association may both require some initial common affinity and produce a stronger feeling of "we-ness," but simple membership—even common problem solving—does not forge a distinct identity comparable to national identities.¹

The remainder of this article addresses three issues. First, it briefly discusses the idea of identity, arguing that some attention to the conceptual foundations of identity is necessary if we are to make progress in understanding it. Second, it argues that a common European identity is not only possible, but that it is already in formation. In making this argument, it will oppose the notion that a European *demos*—at least that variety of popular identity based on ethnic nationalism—must precede a European identity. Third, it argues that loyalty to common institutions and a sense of difference from the United States will be important driving forces behind the process of European identity formation.

THE IDENTITY OF IDENTITY

What is identity? The answer to this question is not at all obvious. The relationships between identity, interests, preferences, and loyalties are not clear. Briefly, identity can be seen as self-conception rooted in society, a sense of who we are in relation to others. Both individual and social components are integral to identity.

Because of this dual nature, identities are less concrete than interests but more substantial than preferences. Identities differ from interests in that they have no objective existence apart from our collective understandings of them. Identities differ from preferences because they are more than wanton or whimsical desires such as a preference for car color. Preferences are highly fluid, open to change at any moment, and detachable from other preferences. There is little logical reason why, given a set of opportunities, one cannot change them frequently and bundle them in numerous ways.² While identities also change, they do so more slowly than preferences. If a person claims to be a Rhinelander on Tuesday and a Bavarian on Wednesday, this would seem strangely inconsistent. Why? Because we expect identities to be somewhat stable: they anchor us and provide an understanding of ourselves and our connections to the world.

The fact that identities are relatively stable does not negate the intuition that there are deep and complex repertoires of identities that individuals can invoke.³ Thomas Risse notes that identities can be nested within one another (as in "I am a Rhinelander, a German, and a European") depending on which identity one wants to invoke or which role the situation demands. This intuition is supported by both social psychological experiments and by broad survey data responses.⁴ Identities can become competitive when similar, yet distinct units claim exclusive loyalties, e.g., when a country makes forswearing loyalties to foreign governments a condition for citizenship or when a superior unit in a hierarchy discourages loyalty to lower units.

THE QUESTION OF EUROPEAN IDENTITY: THE "NO DEMOS" THESIS

This section, examines the question of European identity within the context of democracy in the EU. These two issues are joined here because they are intimately related. To some extent, democratic forms of governance require a common identity among the governed, a *demos*. Some draw the conclusion that democracy is impossible, even irrelevant, for the EU because no distinct European people exists. This "no *demos*" thesis can be confronted in two ways: first, by examining the possibilities for a reorientation of the *demos* in the direction of shared democratic procedures and institutions, and second by identifying an "other" which might serve as a useful external reference point for the development of a European identity.

Why has European identity become a salient issue today whereas twenty years ago it was hardly mentioned? This increasing attention may be due to interrelated economic and political factors, namely the completion of the single market and European Monetary Union (EMU) and the desire to democratize the EU's institutions and policies. By July 1968 the EU (which was at that time the European Economic Community) had created a free trade area making it possible for goods and services to move freely across borders without tariffs and quotas. Just over two decades later, the EU completed the internal market for productive factors as well as goods and services. From 1987 until 1993, the Single European Act guided the EU toward this advanced form of market perfection. By the beginning of 2002, the member states had signed the Treaty of European Union (Maastricht Treaty) and almost seamlessly ushered in a common monetary policy. The EU had reached a new constitutional equilibrium marked by full freedom of movement for people, capital, and goods and services, and a European Central Bank to set common monetary policy. These achievements remain significant. The scope of functions and degree of independence delegated to supranational levels set the EU apart from other international organizations. Yet the EU does not yet perform the full range of functions typical of nation-states, particularly in the

area of social policy and redistribution. It is these areas where pressures for the next stage of integration will build and where the importance of democracy and identity come to light.

Having established a single market and a common monetary policy—along with numerous other things such as common agricultural policy, regional policy, and competition policy—the next big initiatives concern more difficult functional areas marked by the necessity for redistribution and the making of winners and losers. Much of politics is, after all, about redistribution, i.e., taking resources via taxation from some groups and targeting other groups as beneficiaries. EU integration has proceeded from the least controversial field (market-making) to regulatory policies (the Single European Act) to the stabilization policies of the EMU. Redistribution, the most difficult problem area, has been saved for last, and may never come. This historical sequence from least to most controversial would have pleased functionalists and brought a wry smile to Jean Monnet's face.

Since redistribution requires sacrifice, discussing redistribution immediately raises issues of legitimacy. Legitimacy, in turn, raises issues about democracy and identity. Democracy and identity go together, on most accounts, since democracy is rule by or for "the people." The question, "Which people?" follows naturally, and the answer must be framed in terms of shared memories and characteristics such as language and history. Many immediately point to the "no *demos*, no democracy" thesis as an obstacle to this framing.⁵ A democracy requires, at a minimum, a state-like structure of political authority in order to rule. For this rule to be democratic, this structure of political authority must be controlled by a people.

The strongest support for the "no *demos*" thesis is the fact that, as the Rome Treaty recognizes, the EU is composed of many different peoples. The goal is not to create a single people but to coordinate and pursue collective goals among different peoples. Admittedly, there is no European nationalism on a par with French, German, or Italian nationalism: there is no primordial or ethnic basis for European nationalism. Most present day scholars would reject the primordial thesis that each nation-state's feelings came in prepackaged form later expressed in a state, perhaps substituting a communitarian alternative emphasizing common culture, deep affective ties, and feelings of belonging.

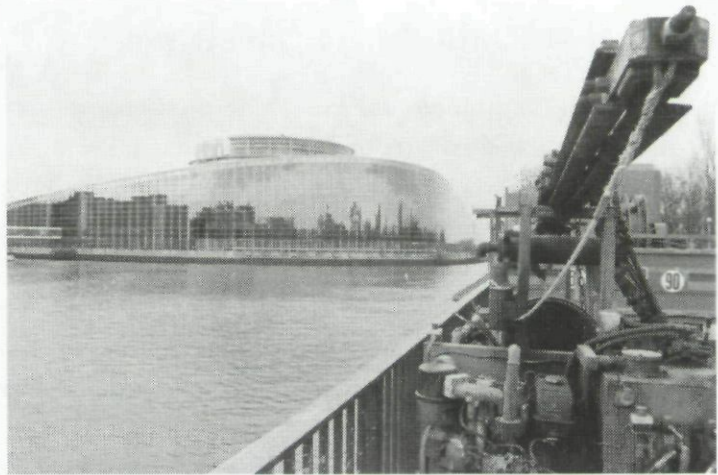
CIVIC IDENTITY

Fortunately, there is another alternative in the form of a civic nationalism or, as some have called it, a constitutional patriotism.⁶ Civic nationalism posits a different object of identification compared to ethnic nationalism. In place of ethnic heritage, civic

nationalists place the focus on democratic institutions and practices, democratic policies arrived at democratically. Even democratic policy outputs arrived at by weak democratic procedures such as parliamentary input may nevertheless enjoy some output legitimacy. Instead of placing the emphasis on the people as an organic entity, civic nationalism shifts the focus to distinctive institutions and collective but democratically-controlled problem solving.

Habermas and Cabrera recognize the need for deeply shared commitments.⁷ Democracy cannot easily flourish among people who only engage in transient, arms-length economic transactions. Even the most economically integrated areas of the world require a foundation built on trust, shared commitment to private property and contracts, and the non-economic institutions of capitalism. If robust transnational and trans-state democratic institutions are to emerge and endure, substantial ties among people are required.⁸

Civic nationalism is not a new concept. Scholars such as Rogers Smith in *Stories of Peoplehood* have put forth the United States and France as models of institutionally oriented nationalism in contrast to Japan and Germany,



Under construction: EU institutions and European identity.

whose traditions are more rooted in notions of distinct peoples.⁹ Of course, in practice all traditions are mixed. The French clearly have an idea of what it means to be French that goes beyond the assimilation of Republican values and in the United States, despite a deeply ingrained constitutional patriotism, there are occasionally violent nativist binges over what it means to be an American and to follow "the American way."

If the model of civic nationalism were applied to the EU, with which institutions and practices would Europe identify? First and foremost, Europeans might identify with the democratic governments of their own countries: the member states of the EU are required to be liberal democracies. Portugal could not be a member under Salazar, nor could Spain under Franco. Only after these dictators fell could Portugal and Spain apply for EU membership; they were not admitted until 1986. This same stipulation applies to countries in Central and Eastern Europe today. They must demonstrate their

credentials as democratic countries—not only through periodic elections but also through the constitutionalization of basic liberties.

Second, Europeans might identify with the collective European institutions, practices, and rights that emanate from Brussels, the capital of Europe. Some of these institutions are not so far removed from the nation-states themselves such as the European Council, composed of heads of state, and the Council of Ministers, composed of

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ministers appointed by heads of state. It should be relatively easy for citizens of the EU to identify with these institutions, if only because these institutions are composed of familiar leaders and fulfill functions that are clearly instrumental to domestic politics. As the most intergovernmental

of the EU's institutions, the European Council consists of directly elected representatives from the electorates of the member states; it can also, therefore, be seen as the most democratic EU institution.

Citizens of the EU can also take some pride in the rights established by the jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice (ECJ). The ECJ has established as a general principle the direct effect of many provisions of the Maastricht Treaty and secondary legislation, thus giving rights and judicial remedies to ordinary citizens. It is unusual for a treaty, a compact among states, to be constitutionalized in this fashion. An international treaty has in this case been transformed so as to provide for binding rights for individuals. In the areas of gender equality, environmental protection, and free movement of people, the ECJ has laid down a standard of jurisprudence that is significant—indeed unparalleled—for an international organization.

Finally, the economic achievements of the EU cannot be overlooked. The EU is primarily concerned with economic matters, but the view of markets on which the ECJ bases its jurisprudence is an embedded one, not the arms-length view of exchange inherent in neoclassical economics. This view of economics, which sees transactions as embedded in social structure, is closer to that of Karl Polanyi than to Leon Walras. It has led to a broad interpretation of economic matters, to include rights of movement, access to services, unemployment and disability benefits associated with crossing national lines for work, and so on. In addition, few would doubt that European integration has been an effective tool in the process of domestic modernization. Without the EU, France, Italy, Germany, and other EU members would not be effective competitors in the globalization game.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AS EUROPE'S "OTHER"

But civic identity may not be enough. Even if successful in terms of generating common loyalties and expectations toward European institutions, a civic identity may not provide enough shared commitment for the next stage of European integration, which is likely to involve the contentious issue of redistribution.¹⁰ If the EU is to take this next step, if democracy is to exist as something more than simply part of a market project, it must draw on the deep reserves of loyalty and caring that derive from collective sacrifice and trial by ordeal. Wars and state-building provided the twin pillars of such collective sacrifice from 1648 well into the twentieth century. Yet these wars pushed in a direction opposite the formation of a common European identity: Europe's wars were mostly civil wars, which only hardened the lines between nation-states.

Compared with the common sacrifice of wartime, the buying and selling of the market—no matter how efficient it may be—provides a tepid and uninspiring alternative pathway to identity. The collective production of wealth as a driving force behind identity formation pales in comparison to the common bonds produced by the joint experience of mortal danger at war. Markets may be good for reasons of scale, specialization, and comparative advantage (Smith and Ricardo were both right), but they do not provide the soul food needed to nourish deep identities. This, in short, is one critique of a European civic nationalism.

Enter the United States of America. Every identity needs an "other," an outsider from which to distinguish oneself and, some would say, to whom one can feel superior. The separate identities of the states in the EU evolved out of European states' competing lethally against one another from 1648 to 1945. But since 1945 Europe has discovered—or is it "invented"?—peace. The legitimacy and acceptance of the present borders have been deeply institutionalized. Diasporas, except for places in Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and Russia, seem contained, though not beyond the possibility of conflict. The cold war is over and the Soviet Union, once a good candidate for Europe's "other," no longer exists. With the expansion of the EU in May 2004, Eastern and Central Europe have mostly been pacified and incorporated. The Balkans and parts of the former Ottoman Empire are members of the EU, applicants to the EU, or living in peaceful relations with Europe. That leaves the Islamic world (particularly fundamentalist Islam) and the United States as plausible candidates for Europe's "other." Here we shall consider the United States.

The United States has always been an ambiguous symbol for European countries and the EU. In the immediate post-war era, the United States was a catalyst for European cooperation through its support of the Marshall Plan, which, in addition to financial transfers, also required multilateral European administration of the program—

an attempt to avoid simply reconstituting a competitive balance of power between the European states. From 1947 to the present,¹¹ the United States has supported European economic unity in almost any form.¹² The Coal and Steel Community, the European Economic Community, the Maastricht Treaty (despite some worry about a common monetary policy), and the present-day constitutional convention all received U.S. support.

Yet the United States has also been an economic competitor to Europe: the United States vies for shares of the market in industries such as airplane production (Boeing versus Airbus) and agriculture and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) competes with U.S.-style subsidies to farmers. The EU and the United States also meet in regulatory competition, where they have different visions of what constitutes a competitive economic environment.

Beyond economics, the United States serves as the "non-Europe" in many different capacities. The alignments are numerous and not necessarily coherent. Militarily, the United States and Europe quarrel within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) over control of the military command structures. Politically, they offer and pursue different leadership roles in the world, from different responses to oil price increases to diverging positions on the war in Iraq. Ideological opposition across the Atlantic has occurred with regard to the International Criminal Court, capital punishment, the end of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Kyoto Treaty on global warming, and most recently and famously, the Iraq War. The presumed efforts of Iran to acquire nuclear weapons and the realization of such nuclear ambitions by North Korea evoke different responses from Europe and the United States. To simplify greatly, the Europeans have a relative preference for "jaw-jaw" and the United States for "war-war."

There is yet another sense in which Europe can and does consider the United States to be its "other," in what can be called the European social model. The United States is sometimes held up—perhaps unfairly—as a model of "jungle capitalism" where there are precious few protections for workers built into the labor market. Unemployment may be lower in the United States, but workers can be more easily fired and have fewer safeguards if they lose their jobs. Further, approximately 44 million Americans are without medical coverage while medical costs as a share of gross national product are substantially higher in the United States than in Europe. Poverty is higher, more people are in jail, life expectancy is lower, and the list goes on.

In opposition to this "jungle capitalism," Europeans juxtapose the "European social model," which is not really just one model—there are British, Swedish, and Italian versions. However, from across the Atlantic, some consistent contrasts emerge. Journalist T. R. Reid defines the European social model as "an elaborate and expensive network of publicly funded, cradle-to-grave programs designed to protect everyone in

Europe against the vicissitudes of contemporary life. Whether the threat to a person's health, comfort, or economic status is natural or man-made, the European social model is there to assist."¹³ Reid describes the European social model as a relentlessly egalitarian and unifying force among Europeans who see themselves as belonging to the "not America."¹⁴ Of course, they pay for their generous welfare states—the paid holidays, the generous pension allowances, the unemployment insurance, the child rearing allowances—but they seem to do so proudly and with open eyes. In principle, a basket of public goods (i.e., goods offered by the state, often with non-excludable benefits) is similar to a basket of private goods offered by the market, except once the policies are in place, every person's basket of public goods is identical. Individuals may not draw the same benefits from the system (some people will lose jobs, others will have health problems), but all will pay for the guarantee of the same potential services. Still, it seems, Europeans are quite proud of their welfare states; politicians do not have to shy away from supporting welfare policies when they campaign for public office.

This pride may go beyond mere self-congratulation. The welfare state is not an issue that must be resolved between the United States and Europe. There need not be an integrated welfare-state policies across the Atlantic. Indeed, the differences between European states themselves are huge. Nevertheless, social welfare is an area where many Europeans feel collectively superior to Americans. European societies, so the argument goes, have less inequality, more social protections, more universal medical coverage, and even greater support for family values—which are, perhaps ironically, very much emphasized in the United States. On this important issue about which both Americans and Europeans claim to care, the more secular Europe actually provides greater public financial support for raising children. In Norway, it is not uncommon for the state to "hire" mothers (and fathers) to raise their own children, as well as to promise that the jobs parents left back in the city will be there for them when they choose to return.¹⁵ In light of the oppositional definition of national identity—a group of people with a common dislike of their neighbors and a shared misperception of their own past—this shared European sense of superiority may contribute to the development of a distinctly European identity.

Many of the differences between the United States and Europe, both stylistic and

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substantive, have been in place for a long time, but they have been treated merely as differences of degree subject to management. However, since 11 September these differences have become more polarized. The United States and Europe have long held different views about the root causes of the problems of the Middle East. Europe, which has a large Muslim presence, has been more sympathetic to the Palestinian position than has the United States, a strong supporter of Israel.

While both the United States and Europe exert pressure on Israel to dismantle some settlements, Israeli Prime Minister Sharon's position is much more precarious in Europe than it is in the United States. In a striking example of polarized opinions, Sharon was dissuaded on a recent trip from visiting the EU headquarters in Brussels for fear of being arrested on human rights violations on the court order of a Belgian judge. Robert Kagan's book *Of Paradise and Power*, unsurprisingly written after 11 September, paints a caricature of the polarized relations between the United States and Europe.¹⁶ This caricature better fits today's mood than the mood of the early nineties when the United States and many European countries fought on the same side in the first Gulf War, and again came together during the several Yugoslav wars. Yet Kagan's message, that "the United States is from Mars, Europe is from Venus," hits a responsive chord today. It is ironic that Jürgen Habermas—the high priest and biggest proponent of communicative interaction as the European route to a civic identity—seized on European opposition to the United States' war with Iraq as a vehicle for identity formation. As Timothy Garton Ash points out, Europeans spent more time talking about the United States and the war in Iraq than about their own constitutional convention, which is supposedly providing a new institutional architecture for the Europe of tomorrow.¹⁷

Sixty years ago, a common European identity was the stuff of dreams. Twenty years ago, a united Europe was thought to be dependent on the cold war struggle. Today, a common European identity in both cultural and political terms is part of an ongoing, progressive achievement. *Europe* is used as a collective expression in the media, and the European arena is the presumptive locus of problem-solving for many issues. The internal debate about a new European constitution, along with the continuing dialogue with the United States—sometimes antagonistic, sometimes cooperative—will determine the contours of Europe's emerging identity. 

NOTES

1. National identities, in turn, were neither naturally given nor the product of common ethnic heritage. They too were forged by various processes, chief of which were the actions (military, political, educational) of states themselves.

2. Of course, restrictions on the ordering of preferences may be introduced, as in the transitivity requirement for a well-behaved utility function.

3. Roy J. Eidelson and Ian S. Lustick, "National Identity Repertoires, Territory, and Globalization," in Mabel Berezin and Martin Schain, eds., *Europe Without Borders* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 89.

4. Thomas Risse, "European Institutions and Identity Change: What Have We Learned?" in Richard K. Hermann, Thomas Risse, and Marilyn B. Brewer, eds., *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU* (Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 148.

5. Federico Mancini, "Europe: the Case for Statehood" (unpublished paper, Luxembourg), 1-17.

6. Jurgen Habermas, "Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe," in Ronald Beiner, ed., *Theorizing Citizenship* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 255-281; Justine Lacroix, "For a European Constitutional Patriotism," *Political Studies* 50 (2002): 944-958.

7. Ibid.; Luis Cabrera, *Political Theory of Global Justice: A Cosmopolitan Case for the World State* (London: Routledge, 2004).

8. Cabrera, *Political Theory of Global Justice*

9. Rogers M. Smith, *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics of Morals and Political Membership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

10. I am aware that some redistributive programs already exist in the EU, among them the common agricultural policy, the regional development funds, and gender equality policies. To administer these policies, there are the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, and the European Social Fund.

11. As I write, President Bush is proclaiming—to no one's surprise—his support for a united Europe.

12. Within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) the story is somewhat different. The United States does not want too much European unity within NATO since this would challenge U.S. control over military strategy within the organization.

13. T.R. Reid, *The United States of Europe* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 146.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., 153.

16. Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

17. Timothy Garton Ash, *Free World: America, Europe, and the Surprising Future of the West* (New York: Random House, 2004).

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