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"WHO WANTS TO BE A EUROPEAN?" COMMUNITY AND IDENTITY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Since the project of European economic and political integration began there has been an ongoing debate about what type of community is emerging and whether it will lead to the development of a pan-European identity. In this article the prospects for the formation of such an identity will be examined. This will include assessing the views of writers for whom the development of a collective European identity faces insurmountable obstacles, most notably the enduring strength of existing national identities. In this regard, Michael Billig (1995) believes the new experiment that is taking place within Europe will still be carried out in the existing language and concepts of nationalism and national identity.

However, it is argued here that if a pan-European identity or sense of "Europeanness" is to emerge it must be a post-national enterprise founded upon the political principles of universal citizenship, democracy and constitutionalism commonly associated with the project of modernity. But if this approach is to be implemented the EU's "democratic deficit" will have to be addressed.

What is Europe?

One factor inhibiting the development of a European identity is the lack of consensus over what "Europe" is, whether in terms of geography, origins, history or culture (Davies 1997). Some commentators, indeed, challenge the existence of Europe as such. For instance, Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1994) has described it as a "fiction". While Anthony Smith considers "Europe" to be "a geographical expression of problematic utility" (Smith 1995, 131).

Identity-formation can be aided through the encounter with those who possess different identities. However, fostering a sense of Europeanness is made more difficult by the fact that Europe lacks a discernible "other". With the passing of the Cold War and the break-up of the USSR, an obvious "other" through which to define the European project has been removed. Moreover, some of the countries that were originally part of the Soviet bloc have been incorporated into the European Union (EU), with others set to join in the near future.

Arguably, in the light of the September 11th attacks and the "war on terror", Islam is coming to assume the role of the "other" for many people within Europe.

However, the development of a European identity in contradistinction to Islam would undoubtedly risk an unwarranted "essentialization" of the latter culture, as well as making the millions of Muslims living in Europe feel even more vulnerable than they presently do. Moreover, with Turkey set to join the EU in the near future such an approach would seem starkly inappropriate in a political sense.

More general problems can arise from fostering identity-formation in relation to an "other". As well as generating an identity based upon exclusivity, it can create new and unnecessary rivalries and tensions. Indeed, in the past identifying difference and otherness contributed to a belief in European superiority, whereby Europe—in contrast to the non-European world—became equated with civilization (Guerrina 2002).[1] And Europe is of course a product of many influences, traditions and invasions—Islamic, Christian, Egyptian, Indian, and so on—and cannot be reduced to a single essence (Pieterse 1994).

Obstacles hindering the formation of a pan-European identity

The most significant obstacle to the formation of a pan-European identity is the nation-state. It continues to be an important and meaningful entity for many people throughout Europe. Anthony Smith points to the continued vitality of nations and nationalism, in comparison with the abstract and even vacuous nature of European identity (Smith 1995, 131).

It seems likely that the EU will continue to be shaped by national agendas in the foreseeable future, and may even provoke national rivalries and tensions. There are many recent instances where national interests have taken precedence over European solidarity, notably in the tensions between EU states over the handling of conflicts in the Gulf and the Balkans. In these cases, national governments were often influenced by domestic political considerations, especially the extent to which their respective populations believed military engagement was in the national interest.

Current trends and developments would also seem to be at odds with the European project. As Noel Malcolm (1998) has noted, there appears to be a movement away from multinational federations. In recent years we have witnessed the break-up of the Soviet Union and the federal Republic of Yugoslavia. India faces ongoing challenges from various separatist movements, notably in Kashmir. Likewise even liberal democracies like Belgium, Canada and Spain are confronted with varying degrees of internal ethno-cultural division and forms of secessionism. Moreover, the history of "Pan" nationalist movements—such as Pan-Africanism and Pan-Slavism—is not a successful one, something which does not bode well for Pan-Europeanism (Smith 1995).

In part this shift away from multinational federations may be linked to the view that the nature of power is changing in the contemporary period, with greater

[1] Given Europe's past and in particular its association with social Darwinism, imperialism and racism, as well as the cultural chauvinism already mentioned, it is pertinent to ask whether we really want to develop an attachment to Europe? However, the type of European project that should be developed is addressed later.

significance attached to economics, in the form of successful businesses and dynamic economies, and away from traditional preoccupations with territory. In this regard, growing and vibrant economies help to ensure employment and good standards of living for domestic populations. While, in contrast the possession of large territorial areas can create many problems for a nation-state or federation, notably in the form of nationalist and separatist movements.

There are other important processes at work within Europe potentially hindering the formation of a pan-European identity, such as development of "Euroregions" and the retreat into forms of ethno-cultural nationalism. In the case of the former, John Newhouse (1998) has traced the growth of regionalism in areas such as Baden-Württemberg, the Rhône-Alpes and Northern Italy. These regions are responding to the challenges and difficulties presented by globalization and "are linking themselves directly to the global economy" (Newhouse 1998, 67). Participants share a belief that forms of cross-border local level co-operation are a productive response to such new conditions. However, Newhouse is less clear about how this type of local regionalism might impact upon a pan-European identity. Although he recognises that some regionalists are in part inspired by a desire to resist the centralizing tide from Brussels (ibid., 71). In reality, the extent to which this development undermines the European project will vary from region to region. It will be dependent upon the particular character of each region in terms of factors such as its history, the strength of regional sentiment and identity, as well as its economic performance.

The turn to ethnic and cultural nationalism poses a more obvious challenge to any supranational identity. Indeed, the formation of a European identity might actually provoke or reinforce existing national identities. This can be seen in the UK where numerous groups and individuals, along with the popular press, have highlighted the threat that the EU allegedly poses to the „British way of life". While within many European countries, extreme right parties and organizations are opposed to any further strengthening of ties with the rest of Europe because of the perceived diminution of national sovereignty and identity that this would entail. Parties like the *Front National* (FN) in France, the Slovak National Party (SNS) in Slovakia and the British National Party (BNP) in Britain are opposed to supranational organizations like the EU and deeper European integration more generally for these very reasons.

In contrast, some nationalist groups and organizations use Europe to further their own cause. For instance, nationalists in Scotland, Catalunya and Cornwall identify with Europe as a way of breaking free from the dominant national identity surrounding them. Scottish nationalists, for example, trumpet their Europeanness alongside their Scottishness, rather than their Britishness. The EU also presents nationalists with political opportunities. In particular, they can argue for their autonomy under the umbrella of the EU. This conveys to the rest of Europe that theirs is not some extremist and destabilizing separatist movement; they simply want to be part of the "European family of cultures". Closer economic ties with the EU can also help to reduce dependence upon their larger neighbour. However, given that it is based upon political expediency there may be limits to this commitment to

Europe and European identity, particularly if it comes to be perceived as detracting from the original intention to promote their, for example, Scottishness.

Michael Billig (1995), recognizing the continuing relevance of nationalism and national identities within Europe, believes the new experiment the EU is promoting will still be carried out in the existing language and concepts of nationalism and national identity. In certain respects the EU appears to be adhering to this approach with the creation of its own flag, anthem (Beethoven's "Ode to Joy") and public holiday (9 May). Moreover, Billig points to the continuing importance of boundaries for "Europe", both in reference to trade and defence, and to the prevention of immigration:

> Thus Europe will be imagined as a totality, either as a homeland itself or as a homeland of homelands. Either way, the ideological traditions of nationhood, including its boundary-consciousness, are not transcended (Billig 1995, 142).

With this point in mind, one way of examining whether a discernible European identity might emerge is to consider patterns of nation-building and national identity-formation in the past. In each case there will be a range of factors, but it is possible to identify a number of common features or characteristics. These might include a common territory and language, a degree of cultural homogeneity, and shared myths of origin and historical memories. However, when such criteria are applied to Europe as the basis for generating a pan-European identity, it soon becomes clear that these constitutive elements are largely absent.

To begin with, as was mentioned earlier, there is no firm consensus over what constitutes "Europe" in terms of territory and borders. Any discussion of Europe invariably centres upon Western Europe, but what countries in the east does it encompass? Does Europe, for example, include Russia?

With the EU continuing to expand it is becoming even more difficult to determine what in fact "Europe" is. At the end of 2002, the EU grew to 25 member states with the admission of ten more countries: Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Malta. This means the population of the EU is now approximately 450 million, and looks set to increase still further. At a summit held in Copenhagen (December 2002), EU leaders underlined their support for the next expansion by backing the ambition of Romania and Bulgaria to join the union in 2007, as well as announcing that Turkey's application to join will be reviewed in December 2004. The EU is already marked by considerable linguistic, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, and as it expands it will inevitably become more heterogeneous. If a degree of cultural homogeneity is considered to be a necessary prerequisite for the formation of a European identity, then the further expansion of the EU would seem to run counter to this development. From this perspective, if the borders of the EU continue to shift, and it becomes too large and too diverse, many citizens may feel they have little in common with their fellow Europeans. To use Benedict Anderson's terminology, it will become harder for them to "imagine" themselves as part of a European community (Anderson 1983).

Lastly, numerous commentators have stressed the importance of shared myths of origin and historical memories as a basis for identity-formation (see Guibernau

1996). But this is something that Europe also lacks. In fact tensions and wars between different nations and peoples have done much to shape European history. And the construction of a common European history or past is immediately faced with the problem of deciding what are to be the shared myths of origin and historical memories. Each country as part of their own process of nation building will have their own key historical memories and figures, and often these emerge out of conflict with other European nations. For example, many people in Britain consider the military victories of the Duke of Wellington and Admiral Nelson, and the leadership of Winston Churchill, to be historically significant. Yet these figures have largely forged their reputations in conflict with France and Germany, respectively. Indeed, the development of a sense of Europeanness has been viewed as a "cultural battlefield" (see Schlesinger 1992). All of which makes it difficult to construct a shared past for the people of Europe to identify with collectively. In this regard, Anthony Smith (1995, 138) maintains

> there are hardly any common *European* myths and symbols that can have meaning and potency for the modern inhabitants of the continent of Europe, and can serve to unify them.

Developing a sense of Europeanness

Despite the considerable obstacles outlined in the previous section, the discussion will now focus upon identifying potentially productive ways by which a pan-European identity might be fostered.

By way of a starting point it is useful to bear in mind that people hold or possess multiple identities and allegiances. These can be based upon gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, culture, locality, region, and so forth. What is therefore to stop us adding "European" to our list of identities? The number of identities that we may possess is not finite. Furthermore, should the European project continue to evolve there is the prospect of hyphenated-identities emerging, such as French-European, Scottish-European, and so on (Guibernau 1999).

One way in which a pan-European identity might be fostered is if there is an organized political elite or class driving such a project. Historians of nationalism often identify a political elite as being at the forefront of the national project. Would such a group be able to play a similar role in fostering a pan-European identity? Whether such a political elite or class exists within Europe is of course is a moot point.[2] If it does, they are likely to be the leading figures and administrators within the EU. As well as working within one of its institutions, they will be educated, bi- or multi-lingual, and regularly travel throughout the EU doing much to champion its cause. However, while it might be possible to detect the existence of such an elite, at present its ability to generate universal acceptance of the European project, and in

[2] Although some commentators consider that the European project has been elite-led from the outset, notably by figures like Jean Monnet (see Featherstone 1994).

turn a European identity, would appear to be limited. In large part this is because an oft-heard complaint emanating from member-states is that the so-called "bureaucrats in Brussels" are detached, largely unaccountable and, in a few recent instances, corrupt. Indeed, arguably the more the European project is promoted by such figures, the greater the likelihood of it provoking national and local forms of resistance.

In one sense it might be the case that little needs to be done in order to generate a pan-European identity. In this regard, nationalism can possibly offer us some insight into identity-formation. Craig Calhoun (1997) suggests that the appeal of nationalism lies in its immediacy rather its antiquity: that is, it has resonance and meaning in the everyday life of its citizens. If this is the case, might this also be applicable to Europe? More specifically, given that Europe is becoming a "lived experience" for more and more people—reflected in the increasing numbers of Europeans working and living in different countries from those in which they were born and raised—is it possible a European identity will emerge naturally over time? The immediacy of Europe is further reinforced by the fact that the EU's treaties and institutions are having an ever-greater impact upon the lives of Europeans, notably in the areas of social legislation, labour-market conditions, and so forth. While at a more informal level, an increasing number of people are taking weekend breaks, going on business trips and attending conferences within Europe, and cultural exchange programmes (such as ERASMUS) continue to flourish. Similarly, travel within Europe is much easier, as a result of the establishment of the European single market and currency, as well as developments like Inter-rail and the Channel Tunnel (Leonard 1998, 27). As the borders of nation-states become less significant for their respective citizens, might more and more of them start to "imagine" Europe as their community?

However, this approach to generating a sense of Europeanness would be a very long-term process. Even by the second half of the 1990s, 97 per cent of Europeans had had no direct contact with the EU and its institutions, nor been involved in any of its cultural events (Leonard 1998). Moreover, there is no guarantee that a European identity would ever take hold "naturally" and without any attempt to make the European project attractive to the peoples of Europe. This is largely because the experience of "Europe" for many people is a negative one. There are frequent complaints across member-states about such matters as EU regulations, unaccountable officials, bureaucratic decision-making, the conduct of other countries, competition for domestic jobs and commercial contracts, and so on. Better ways of generating a pan-European identity must therefore be found. With this in mind, a potentially more productive approach will now be outlined.

Contrary to the discussion in the previous section, some writers reject the notion that the constitutive elements of nationalism are required in order to foster a pan-European identity. Jürgen Habermas (1992, 1999) argues that the European project must be built upon political principles of democracy and the constitutional state, and regards the EU as having the potential to act as a vehicle for the extension of democratic governance beyond the nation-state. In particular, he believes the development of Europe must be founded upon a "constitutional patriotism". While he acknowledges that a constitution by itself will not be able to achieve a pan-European solidarity, it nevertheless can make an important contribution to this end.

Moreover, for Habermas the emphasis upon political principles and political citizenship is more appropriate for our increasingly pluralist and multicultural societies, which he considers cannot be held together by traditional nationalism (Habermas 1998, 408).

Such an approach would establish a set of practices or orientations, notably those of participation and inclusiveness, which if implemented may well prove attractive to many Europeans creating a project that they can identify with. In contrast, the EU as it currently operates is regularly criticized for its "democratic deficit", ranging from the low levels of public participation it engenders to the lack of democratically accountable governance with most European citizens unaware who is making decisions on their behalf (see Magnette 2003). How these shortcomings can be rectified—and in particular the ways in which EU governmental structures, institutions and processes should be reformed—has attracted considerable comment (see, for example, Smith and Wright 1999). There will be no attempt to rehearse these arguments here. Rather, I want to consider the more general issue of whether political principles and constitutions are an appropriate way of generating a European identity.

At this juncture there is little indication that a constitution for Europe as currently conceived will be able to generate popular interest and enthusiasm. This was evident in the negotiation process leading to the formulation of the draft constitution during 2003. With the exception of the UK, which has well-known sensitivities towards anything involving the issue of national sovereignty, the process aroused little media and popular interest in continental Europe. This might be because the majority of people within Europe do not feel their liberties and democratic freedoms to be under any immediate or foreseeable threat. It is also the case that many European states already have their own constitutions, and the rights and liberties of their citizens are firmly embedded within them.

Nevertheless many European politicians believe a constitution for Europe will help to make the EU more accountable and therefore appealing to its citizens. As well as establishing the principles upon which the EU is based, a written constitution would in theory resolve the problem of competing national and Union jurisdictions by defining authoritatively their respective spheres of operation.

Yet there are limits to what a constitution might achieve. Such principles are a feature of the constitutions of the United States, Canada and Australia, but arguably they rely as heavily upon other unifying factors, notably a shared history and a common culture. Moreover, Canada and the US provide ample evidence that even within a single state, a written constitution can become a battleground. And a constitution formulated for a union of many nation-states like the EU could be the site of perpetual political conflict. The collapse of talks in Brussels over the EU's new constitution in December 2003 is perhaps an early indication of this tendency. This major summit was brought to a premature close after four of the key players—France, Germany, Poland and Spain—could not reach an agreement on voting powers under the new constitution (Hinsliff, Ahmed 2003).

There is also the issue of whether political principles are capable of generating identities. Identification with a set of principles does not address what many communitarian theorists would regard as a deep human need for a sense of

"rootedness" and the desire to belong to a particular community. From this perspective, the nation or nation-state is better able to fulfil such needs, in comparison with transnational organizations and bodies like the EU. Indeed, many communitarians consider the nation-state provides an especially useful framework for developing citizenship. For instance, acquiring a sense of duty and responsibility towards others is more likely when we feel a close connection with them or have a sense of shared identity. In contrast, non-state conceptions of citizenship—such as those operating at the global or European level—can appear too remote because they function beyond the everyday experience of most people. Although many liberal theorists would challenge this notion that we have a fundamental human need to identify with a particular community, placing greater emphasis upon the free and rational person and their ability to adhere to universal and rational rules of conduct.

Another way of viewing this dispute between communitarians and liberals is to regard it as essentially a debate between Hegel and Kant. More specifically, it is a debate that revolves around Hegel's distinction between *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität*. As Shlomo Avineri and Avner de-Shalit (1992) have noted, *Moralität* constitutes the "abstract or universal principles or rules of morality", while the former "encompasses the ethical principles that are specific to a certain community" (ibid., 2). For various reasons, Hegel and many contemporary communitarians place greater weight upon *Sittlichkeit*, and often consider it to exert a greater influence upon us. In terms of this debate, the nation-state would represent *Sittlichkeit*, and the EU—given the emphasis that has been made here upon universal principles—would refer to *Moralität*. It means therefore that those who seek to promote the European project along these lines—that is, a constitutional patriotism—are confronted with the undoubted pull our particular ethical community can exert upon us.

In defence of constitutional patriotism, it should not be assumed that our particular ethical community or nation-state is separated from the more universal principles of democracy and liberty. This is because the nation-state is itself an important part of the project of modernity. It is a point often forgotten because there is a tendency to associate the nation-state with the forces of particularism and hence to view it as standing at odds with the universal values of modernity (Delanty, O'Mahony 2002). Moreover, as stated earlier, in the particular case of Europe many states have incorporated such values for decades. This means therefore that the European project founded upon such lines can serve to reinforce national practices, and point out when governments stray from such principles.

Yet irrespective of the relative strengths of the liberal and communitarian positions, there must be some doubt about the degree of allegiance and commitment a set of principles can inspire. Moreover, even if we accept that political principles can generate identity-formation, what are the distinctively European ideas and beliefs that might help forge a European identity? While writers like Habermas would identify democracy and constitutional liberty as the basis for generating a pan-European identity, it is also the case that many countries and regions beyond Europe are founded upon such principles. In that sense they can no longer be regarded as exclusively "European" principles.

However, there are at least two responses that can be made to the above charge. Firstly, Europe has historically been associated with such values; they are part of its

Enlightenment heritage. This means there is no attempt to "invent" a tradition. Consequently, it gives the European project a degree of legitimacy. Secondly, it does not matter if other regions in the world have also come to embrace such values and principles, as long as the EU is consistent in its implementation of them, this is what Europe can come to be associated with. This in turn can help to define what it means to be a "European"; that is, someone who adheres to the rule of law and believes in democracy, liberty, human rights, and so forth.

Another likely criticism of the approach advocated here concerns how the values and principles that go to make-up a constitutional patriotism can best be disseminated. For many people the EU actually erodes democracy through its undermining of national parliaments. It is certainly true that the position of the EU has come to be enhanced in relation to that of member states, with it gaining new areas of transnational sovereignty, especially in relation to the establishment of the single European market. In the long-term, European governments may come to focus upon a particular range of policy-making areas, such as education, health, transport, the family and moral issues, while the EU concerns itself with more transnational matters, such as the environment and macro-economic issues to do with business and trade. For some commentators, however, nationalism and the nation-state are the best guarantors of democracy and civil liberties (see Ignatieff 1999; Nodia 1994). Conversely, where the nation-state is fragile, such as in many parts of Africa, there is invariably a lack of democracy and human rights abuses. Consequently, democrats often view with suspicion any supranational organization like the EU.

In response, defenders of the European project would rightly highlight the numerous instances of atrocities committed by states against their own citizens, as well as to citizens of other nation-states during times of war. There are also forms of nationalism, notably ethnic and cultural nationalism, which are exclusive and often discriminatory in nature. While Habermas notes there is nothing intrinsic about the nation-state that makes it the most appropriate framework for democracy: "the nation-state established only temporarily the close link between the *ethnos* and the *demos*" (Lacroix 2002, 946). Furthermore, in support of the European project, it should be noted that there has been an attempt to make European citizenship part of the attempt to democratize the EU, notably through the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.[3]

Conclusion: the prospects for the emergence of a European identity

Thus we have a mixed and complex picture. The European economic and political project has been underway since the 1950s, yet it is debatable whether a sense of Europeanness shapes the everyday outlook of many of the peoples of Europe. Given the obstacles it faces, if a pan-European identity is to emerge it is likely to take decades rather than years.

[3] However, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights has been criticized for not tackling the democratic accountability of EU institutions (see Venables 2001).

As has been shown, to forge such an identity in contradistinction to an "other" is problematic. This also applies to any attempt to appeal to a romantic conception of nationalism, which emphasizes history, cultural uniqueness and exclusivity. There are also limitations to any project that is elite-led or simply allowed to evolve naturally over time. Rather, if a European identity is to take hold it needs to be an actively promoted post-national project that is properly democratic and inclusive. The importance of striving for this is reflected in the evidence of growing popular dissatisfaction with the EU in its current form. A survey conducted in 1998 revealed that only 50 per cent of respondents identified with EU institutions (Leonard 1998, 6). This is reflected in declining voter turnout at successive European elections. In 1979, over 61 per cent of those citizens eligible to vote did so. By the elections of 1999 this figure had dropped to under 50 per cent (Lynch 1993). The project of European integration may therefore be hindering the development of a European identity. Yet achieving the latter is important in terms of the political legitimacy of the EU. For example, its legislation and judicial rulings require a degree of public support and commitment to the European project. Without this it simply appears as an alien organization imposing its will upon the peoples of Europe. The need to remedy the EU's democratic deficit has therefore never been more urgent.

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