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European Identity and the Challenge of Enlargement

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Introduction

As a citizen of Germany, I have seen the transformation initiated through German unification first-hand and am well aware of the multifaceted challenges facing political systems that gain additional entities. After more than 15 years, Germany is still deeply affected by disparities that mark not only the economic and political realities of Western and Eastern Germans, but also (maybe most importantly), their differences concerning a common national identity. A new 'gesamtdeutsche' identity is only very slowly evolving and has to overcome issues of historical differences, political representation and social cohesion.

Similarly, the process of EU enlargement - the widening aspect of European integration - has to deal with similar obstacles. Last year's monumental enlargement is still high on the agenda of European policy-makers and their constituents and already, more successive enlargements are planned influencing the course of future integration today, as can be seen in the debate surrounding the ratification of the EU constitution and the role Turkey's accession plays in it.

Therefore, the question to what extent old and new member states in the EU are willing and able to transform their transnational European identity is of utmost importance for the future of the Union. In this paper, I will first lay out some theoretical aspects of the term and then look at some of the issues surrounding the necessitated change in identification with Europe, arguing that if the Union is to retain their citizen's approval, it will have to decide how 'civic' and diverse it wants to become and communicate these objectives more clearly to its constituents.

European identity or European identities?

While research about the existence of a cultural European identity, based on historical, religious and other commonalities exist in abundance, there is no concise definition available that would capture all essential elements. Few scholars focus specifically on the formation of a European identity on a socio-political level. Only recently Michael Bruter investigated attitudes towards the separate civic and cultural components of a European identity, finding that European identity does not automatically translate into support for EU integration but is linked to mainly civic ideas about the EU.[1] In general the literature on post-national citizenship and identity proposes that the transformation of identities in the EU is occurring as a result of various factors: differentiation and ascription from outside, below and above (e.g. how Europeans see themselves as such and how they

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[1] Bruter, Michael. "Civic and Cultural Components of a European Identity: A Pilot Model of Measurement of Citizens' Levels of European Identity", in: Risse, Thomas, Herrmann, Richard & Brewer, Marilyn. Transnational identities, Rowman & Littlefield: New York, 2004, pp. 186-213.

distinguish other 'non-EU' Europeans as well as non-Europeans), internal homogenization (e.g. the convergence of standard of living, of law or of culture) and inclusion (e.g. of the societal peripheries to the center).[2] It also highlights the changes in identity through the media and the perceived value gained from possessing a European identity. An 'identity' growth is postulated that enables people to maintain their identity as nationals as well as Europeans. In this respect, the EU has actually achieved a identity hegemony in the sense that the EU has occupied, over the period of only 50 years, the political and social space which was previously regarded as solely European. [3]

Juergen Habermas strongly proposes a transformation of (Western) European societies from national to transnational communities, moving from 'ethnos to demos'. This approach is linked with his ideal of a constitutional patriotism, according to which citizens should not identify with a cultural or ethnic identity but rather with constitutional principles that guarantees their rights and duties.[4] The step to create a common constitution for the EU revived Habermas' theory. Coincidentally, it clashes with some of the real existing problems such as the exclusion of third-country nationals and minorities living in EU member states. Does the EU's Constitution apply to these collectives as well? And how can a common constitution, as a instrument of nation-building, be reconciled with a call for a civic patriotism? These are just a few questions that are left open to discussion. The idea of liberal contractualism as a way to bind European citizens closer to the EU has been explored by other scholars who maintain that citizens accept institutions as legitimate if they can be justified by some kind of social contract.[5] So far, this principle has been mainly applied in the national arena, since there are few instances in which the EU established a social contract with its citizens; treaties are not recognized as such. While this theory is helpful in dealing with a diversified Union, unfortunately it remains an academic approach without significance for the day-to-day politics of the Union or its citizens.

The inclusive principle of identity transformation is essential for theorists who maintain that a new European identity is emerging that encompasses national sub-identities and at the same time allows for cultural and ethnic differences embedded in a broader societal context. This multi-cultural, inclusive conception clashes with the argument that the way the EU is promoting European identity is that of an official 'Euronationalism', the promotion of an exclusive political block. Analysts generally agree in doubting the suitability of the nation-model for a just and plural system of transnational governance.[6] Even though common characteristics are certainly helpful in

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[2] Muench, Reinhard. Nation and Citizenship in the Global Age. Palgrave: New York, 2001. , pp. 136-185. Dunkerley, David et al (eds). Changing Europe: Identities, Nations and Citizens. Routledge: New York, 2002.

[3] Risse, 2004, Ibid.

[4] Habermas, Juergen. Post-National Constellation. Polity Press/MIT: Cambridge, 2001.

[5] Rawls, John. Political Liberalism. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
[6] Delgado-Moreira, Juan. Cultural Citizenship and the Creation of European Identity. Electronic Journal of Sociology: www.sociology.org/content/vol002.003/delgado.html, March 29, 2003; Schwarzmantel, John. Citizenship and Identity. Routledge: New York, 2003, pp. 86-98.

fostering an identity, past examples have usually been exclusive and oppressive and thus cannot provide a model for an acceptable transnational identity structure.

Many scholars agree that in current EU member states the Europeanization of domestic collective identities occurs according to nation-specific characteristics of their nation and Europe.[7] "Specific concepts of the nation and collective identities, that emerged in each country, are associated with specific modes of integrating immigrants and integrating Europe as well as integrating the country into Europe".[8] That is why France has pursued a more ambitious but also more transnational concept of Europe and the EU than for example, Britain. But while this has been true for the last 50 years of integration, I want to make the point that in recent years, this process also started to work in a reverse mode. It is not exclusively the states' conception of their view of Europe anymore that has a monopoly on domestic identity discourses, but the EU as an active player informs collective identity formation as well. Firstly, the EU has developed a tight network of competencies and policies that tangibly influence domestic political spheres in an unprecedented way. Secondly, there now are too many member states cooperating in the Union as that a nationalized notion of Europe or the EU could prevail in one state. The Franco-German dominance in EU policy making, for example, is increasingly clashing with differing views of other member states seeking equal power. The recent enlargement negotiations made this process already apparent, in which Europeanization informed national identity in the candidate countries to quite a large extent, e.g. with the debate about how much new member states should compromise their national interests during integration into the EU.

As a political integration project planned by European elites, the European identity propagated by the EU lacks the 'natural' foci of identity as maintained by the essentialists. Most citizens of the EU aspire in some way or another to profit from the Union's policies, showing more instrumental support and less affective identification. Even so, it cannot be generalized that purely material interests determine public support for the EU.[9] A stable 'permissive consensus' among the majority of the EU public existed, thereby constraining or facilitating but not determining the future direction and/or pace of European integration.[10] However, this is not the case anymore since the approval of European integration has suffered significantly in the last 10-15 years, marked by the electoral gains of nationalistic parties in member states as well as low popular support for European elections and treaties. Skeptics also call attention to the

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[7] Cowles, Maria G., Caporaso, James & Risse, Thomas (eds). Transforming Europe. Europeanization and Domestic Change, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 2001; Muench, Reinhard, Ibid.

[8] Ibid, p. 3.

[9] Bosch, Augusti, & Newton, Kenneth. "Economic Calculus or Familiarity Breeds Content?", in: Niedermayer, Oscar & Sinnott, Richard. Public Opinion and Internationalized Governance, from the series: Beliefs in Government, Vol. 2, Oxford University Press: New York, 1995, p.73-103.

[10] Niedermayer, Oscar & Sinnott, Richard, Ibid, p. 31.

absence of popular approval for the EU, the democratic deficit and constitutional problems.[11] Others state that the functional logic, which postulates a spillover of economic integration into the politico-institutional level, doesn't apply to the identitive layer of integration. For once, because it is too complex of a task and secondly, EU politicians have failed in achieving this goal.[12]

The identity of Europeans, which for the sake of a working definition should be regarded here as a cultural-political European collective identity, is obviously a very complex and abstract phenomenon. It is remarkable to find in this context on the one hand a particularistic call for common identity factors such as history, politics and economics and other socio-cultural aspects and on the other hand, a pluralist-minimalist definition of Europe that wants to create an inclusive, civic conception of European values. The reality lies in a combination of both tendencies: so far, EU citizens posses a capacity to tolerate intra-European cultural diversity but still want to maintain their own national culture, which is consistent with the socio-psychological group-identity model. At the same time, the necessity of more common policy actions under conditions of enlargement conflicts with the ideal of European unity as well as with the reality of the own culture and national interest under integration pressure.

A conceptualization of the idea, identity and reality of Europe differentiates between those three aforementioned approaches to Europe with regard to their ideological content. Nonetheless, one has to be wary about the chances to create such a transnational identity in current societies of the Union. Critics contends that the post-war European project was born as a model of economic, not explicitly political, integration resulting from the wish to overcome the disastrous European hegemonic history in the first half of the twentieth century, an argument that is still hotly debated in EU studies because it goes to the core of what European integration is about. That is why some call for an 'alternative' collective identity built on multi-culturalism and linked to a post-national citizenship in the Union.[13] Delanty's work demarcates well the notions and ideologies behind the goal of a united Europe but does not reflect on the current re-nationalizing conditions in the EU's public spheres.

Other researchers depict identity formation and integration as a rather divisive and excluding process, either within countries of the European Union or between them. With regards to the processes inside the affected states, European integration is theorized as a catalyst for disparities between socioeconomic different constituencies of the population. "European integration is going to open up a new gap between the mobile elite of people moving toward a European identity and the less mobile people sticking to national solidarity"[14]. While this view is generally true, it presupposes that mobility – which is not

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[11]Rusconi, Gian Enrico. "The Difficulty in Building a European Identity", in *The International Spectator*, Vol. 23, No.1, 1998.

[12] Klaus Armingeon, <u>Nation and National Identity</u>. Ruegger: Bern, 1999.

[13] Delanty, Gerard. <u>Inventing Europe: idea, identity, reality.</u> St. Martin's Press: New York, 1995.
[14] Muench, Ibid, p. 1.

further specified here either in literally or metaphorical sense – is the decisive factor. This dichotomy is oversimplified and should also include other influential factors such as knowledge, political involvement etc.

Especially in view of European countries that are not (yet) part of the Union, the exclusionary idea is preeminent for researchers of collective identities. They raise question about the future self-understandings of Europeans with regard to the impetus of widening.[15] Enlargement makes changes in identifications necessary, in the existing member states as well as in the accessing ones. The last enlargement could be seen as an EU-internal test for cultural plurality still under conditions of a homogeneous attachment to Europe - something that is bound to change with successive enlargements.

European identity and enlargement

The ongoing enlargement process of the EU forces policy makers and citizens in both, the acceding and the established member states of the Union, to reflect upon their existing identity. On first sight, enlargement seems to be a relatively unproblematic feature of European integration since in theory the EU receives more power with the addition of new markets and states, and the accession countries have much to gain from joining an economically and politically well-developed entity such as the EU. In practice, however, there are many factors that need to be considered in the process of enlargement, in particular with regards to questions surrounding national and European identity. Most problems with the accessing countries so far have tended to focus on rather practical issues related to the disparity in wealth and problems arising from intra-European competition of these new members.[16] There was no real discussion about the compatibility of the newcomer's cultural identity with the existing ideas of (Western) European identity, nor a much needed debate about the finality objective of the Union. For once, the added member states so far are securely located within the geographical and cultural boundaries of the continent and particularly the last enlargement to the East was seen as a political necessity justified by detrimental post World-War II developments. In addition, the Central and Eastern European countries even display a higher (self-professed) level of cultural European identity than their Western counterparts.[17]

In view of further enlargements to the South-Eastern edge of Europe, a social science perspective on the enlargement process started asking where the geographical and ideational borders of Europe are and how far the integrating potential of the EU with

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[15] Strath, Bo. <u>Europe and the Other and Europe as the Other</u>. Presses Europeennes: Brussels, 2000. Neumann, Iver B. <u>Uses of the Other. The East in European Identity Formation</u>. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1998.

[16] Zielonka, Jan. "Challenges of Enlargement", in: *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 15, No.1, pp. 22-35 (2004).

[17] Huntington, Samuel. "The clash of civilizations", Council of Foreign Relations: NY, 1996. Mungiu-Pippidi, Alina. "Beyond the new borders", in: *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 15, No.1, pp. 48-

regards to common identification really is. [18] Particularly now that the EU's external borders reach neighboring countries such as the Ukraine or Georgia that are setting their goals on possible EU accession, in addition to the 'big' question of Turkey's membership in the Union, the debates setting conditions for belonging to Europe and having a common identity have intensified. Others added that rather than developing a popularized distinct European identity, Europe is simply taking over the globally spread Americanized (pop-)culture, and the real identity of concern should be the EU's institutional one.[19] The role of the United States is also notable when looked at the EU's differentiation with North America. Despite the infiltration of U.S. cultural elements, Europe has distanced itself to the markedly different cultural and political identity that the States represent, particularly under the administration of George W. Bush. Most new member states in Central and Eastern Europe have a more pro-American attitude and therefore altered previously existing identity-dynamics within the EU.

The shared-heritage argument citing common cultural and historical roots, proposed by conventional wisdom and used by many EU politicians as a means to construct European identity, is of limited use in a political Union trying to cope with 25 or more member states that might be considered remotely European. Often enough, this argument has been discounted by opponents stating that Europe was more often than not torn apart by rivalries and split between competing powers, churches and governments.[20] A single demos for the EU as in the development of the collective national identities in Europe in the 19th century is not a viable option for the development of a transnational community. And if the recently admitted countries' 'return to Europe' was a sign of reconciliation with Europe's often unjust past, how can the same principle be applied to countries such as Turkey that were historically Europe's 'other' and are still perceived as such in the EU in spite of Turkey's changes? [21] Cultural convergence with Europe is impossible in the case of Turkey, and is doubted by some in the case of the Balkan countries. This is not to deny that fact that there are already some linkages between these countries and the existing EU members, be it in the form of association agreements or the existence of immigrants from these countries in the EU member states. In fact, the inclusion of culturally different states such as Turkey or civil-war torn states like the Balkan countries into the EU could serve as a more peaceful and successful counter-model to the prevailing US model of democracy promotion and nation-building.

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Moxon-Browne, Edward. "Eastern and Western Europe: Towards a new European identity?", Moxon-Browne, Edward (ed). Who are the Europeans now?, Ashgate: Burlington, VT, 2004, p.193-202.

[20] Comisso, Ellen & Gutierrez, "Brad, Eastern Europe or Central Europe? Exploring a distinct regional identity", in: *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, UCIAS: San Diego, Vol. 3, Article 7, 2002, p. 3.

[21] The Economist, "Looking to Europe: A survey of Turkey", March 19, 2005.

In addition, the increase in membership and population of the EU will result in greater heterogeneity with respect to national interests and national identities.[22] Inevitably, the conflict potential for decision-making at the institutional Union level will increase, even with the augmented qualified-majority voting as spelled out in the Constitution. While Europeanization processes will over time lead to a convergence of diverging national interests, the simple fact remains that it will become more difficult to reach agreement if more member states are involved, in addition to the need for continuous institutional reform necessitated by future enlargements, as there are at present no provisions for future candidates beyond Bulgaria and Romania to be included in the EU institutions.

The diversity in national interests, as a result of the widening of the Union, will inevitably lead to a weakening of federalist and supranational approaches of European integration. It has even been argued that "those in favor of looser forms of European co-operation may advocate a speedy and wide-reaching enlargement as a means of undermining the federalist ambitions of other member states, and this in turn leads to fears that the latter will be tempted to pursue more advanced forms of integration within a smaller and more convergent European core".[23] Obviously, the calls for enhanced cooperation and more generally, the development of variable geometry integration for some core European states attest to the validity of this thinking, leading in the long run to a less supranational federation of member states but a rather loose model of cooperation. As noted above, this approach to integration will find more support in intergovernmentally oriented old and new member states, and will also be positive for the economic performance of the Union: "a loose, diversified and flexible European polity will be better than a rigorously homogenized and centralized one at coping with the challenges posed by cascading interdependence in a world of rapid change".[24]

In order to retain and augment public support for an increasingly diverse Union, traditional models of European identification built upon cultural commonalities will not suffice anymore. The EU's identity as a model of regional integration will have to focus on delivering effective and democratic political and economic governance, deserving of the allegiance of EU citizens, instead of relying on the cultivation of state-centric models of loyalty to a political entity. A 'thick' cultural identity as evident in many of Europe's nation-states has never been achieved by the EU and further widening will only enable a 'thin' version of common identification based on common civic values, democratic practices, respect for diversity and for human rights. Interestingly, in the debate about Turkey's accession, many Turks, in view of the some of the opposing arguments citing cultural differences, reply that if the EU stands for the civic values

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[22] Fuchs, Dieter & Klingemann, Hans-Dieter. "Eastward Enlargement of the European Union and the Identity of Europe", West European Politics, Vol. 25, No. 2, April 2002, pp. 19-43.

[23] Zielonka, Jan & Mair, Peter. "Introduction: Diversity and Adaptation in the Enlarged European Union", *West European Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 2, April 2002, pp. 1-18.

[24] Zielonka, 2004, Ibid, p. 5.

mentioned above, a narrow definition of its own identity based on religion, ethnicity or culture would negate those fundamental principles.[25]

The creation of a European citizenship as a promoter of European identity has been introduced with the Maastricht Treaty.[26] However, this measure has had no significant impact on the ability of the EU to gain popular allegiance since, aside from the freedom of movement, it did not add significantly to the rights of EU citizens. Rather, the complementarity of the EU's citizenship to the national one needs to be stressed because people tend to see the overarching transnational citizenship as a threat to their national one. While EU citizenship in theory has become generally more open and flexible through the enlargement's inclusion of additional nationalities, it remains insignificant for the EU's identity to cope with the centrifugal implications of future enlargements as long as it is contingent on a priori citizenship of a member state. The member states' hesitancy in creating a common regulatory framework for immigration and asylum policy shows that European citizenship is still too strongly attached to national citizenship to be an effective transporter of the civic ideas of pan-European unity. While the former is a problem dealing with the basic idea behind European citizenship, another unresolved would be how to communicate a real transnational citizenship to the EU public if it already displays xenophobic reactions to its new EU citizens?

Conclusion

The last, fifth enlargement challenges the institutional capacity and economic cohesion of the EU to a dramatic extent. More importantly, the increase in membership will make it more difficult to achieve socio-political cohesion, let alone a common cultural identification. The impetus of widening starkly contrasts with the Union's attempt to construct and preserve a common cultural identification for Europe. It is my conviction that continued enlargement, particularly with countries of different religious and ethnic-cultural backgrounds, will lead to a weakening of common reference points for a European identity, therefore making it less useful as an instrument for European integration. A multi-level governance, based on (neo-)functional integration will continue to internally homogenize the various member states of the EU, but any approach of developing a transnational identity from above, based on cultural commonalities, will be subordinated to the various interests and diverging national identities of the many member states.

Moreover, these developments make any attempts of European integration along lines of nation(-state) building more difficult and unpopular. That is why, for example, the constitutionalization of the European polity receives only limited popular support: besides other arguments against it, the constitution is seen as an instrument of furthering state-centric integration at a time when the EU is more diverse than ever before. The widening of the EU has reached a critical mass in terms of identity-

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[25]Hanh, Ahmet. "Turkey's Entry Bid will oblige the EU to define its own identity", in: European Affairs, Vol. 4, No. 3, Fall 2004,
http://www.europeanaffairs.org/current_issue/2004_fall/2004_fall_54.php4, April 18, 2005.
[26] Guerrina, Roberta. Europe: History, Ideas and Ideologies. Oxford University Press: New York, 2002, pp. 180-189.

construction, therefore deepening will have to be redefined as to reflect the changed identity of the Union, which will need to be more intergovernmental and less federational to (re-)gain and retain popular support.