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EU 10 years after its biggest enlargement: Europe's identity crisis Looking in the black box of European cultural and political identities

Abstract: One of the biggest challenges faced by the EU is also one of the most ignored by academics. Many talk about an economic, ecologic or democratic crisis but few focus on a key-issue: the European identity crisis. What does it mean to 'be European'? How does our definition of 'Europeanness' impact the widening and deepening of the European Union?

This paper argues that a Western-European culture exists. It has been shaped by a millennium of Catholic influence which fostered the distinction between politics & religion. It is therefore distinct from an Eastern-European culture mostly shaped by the influence of the Orthodox Church. Such Western-European culture gives enough cultural unity to allow the EU to become a more politically integrated Union.

Cultural unity is however not enough to create a political union. There is also the need for political identity. Such political identity already exists but is rarely made explicit: contrary to what the official wisdom says, what is now the current EU was rather built as a project of non-domination than as a project of peace *per se*. The founders of what is now the EU were convinced that non-domination could only be ensured by a genuine pooling of national sovereignty.

Enlargements undermined both identities. Firstly the EEC enlarged to a united-kingdom that shares this Western-European cultural identity, but not a political identity. Later Eastern-European countries like Bulgaria joined, undermining the pre-existing cultural identity.

This paper argues that Western-Europe can become a genuinely integrated political union (what one may call EU 2.0). This also means that countries where the majority culture is Eastern-European, Turkish or Arab cannot be part of such political

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union, but can be part of a loosely integrated Union focusing rather on non-salient economic issues (what one may call EFTA 2.0).

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JEL codes: Y80, Z12, Z13, Z18.

Introduction: why an identity crisis matters?

The aim of the paper is to analyse the current state of the European Union and its possible future evolution. This paper is the fruit of a research using historical materials to better understand the situation of the EU today, adopting a methodological analysis developed by Fernand Braudel and other historians, the approach of the 'second level of time' that puts the emphasis on long-term cultural, economic and social history [Braudel 1949]. The focus is also paced on the notions of cultural & political identities as underlined by, amongst others, Robert Frank [Frank 2004].

From this standpoint this paper underlines the difficulties faced by the fact that some countries which are culturally Eastern-European are members of the Western-European political organization, namely the EU (Romania, Bulgaria, Greece & Cyprus).

Today's EU is at the crossroads of several crisis, amongst which are an economic crisis, ecologic crisis, and democratic crisis.

This paper's main focus will however be a crisis that is often ignored by economists, politicians, political scientists, etc.. This key crisis is an **identity crisis** deriving from the absence of a clear answer as to what it means to 'be European'.

Through history each age invented their own answer, their own vision of 'Europeanness' [Delanty 1995]. Many of those answers were built around the Christian faith and/or the colour of one's skin. After the atrocities of WWII many tried to figure out whether a post-national identity may be grounded in new constructions such as the idea of 'constitutional patriotism' [Habermas 1992].

Regardless of how intellectually attractive or repelling those ideas may be there were unable to change the fact that, still today, 87% of the Europeans claim that they are only or firstly nationals [European Parliament 2013]. Nor did it change the fact that the rising political parties in Europe are far-right nationalist and xenophobic parties.

Hence finding a solution to our current identity crisis is key in avoiding several of the current crises which may converge into a severe political crisis that may lead to semi-authoritarian regimes in the EU as it did in Russia in the late 90's or in Viktor Orban's Hungary.

Finding a solution to our current identity crisis is also key to the understanding of the shortcomings of some of the EU's enlargement in the past and to avoid such shortcomings in cases of future enlargements (Ukraine, Turkey, etc.).

This paper argues that 'being European' is a matter of culture. A culture is a set of external norms and ideas formed by history that shape one's vision of the world [Simmel 1997]. The European culture can also be understood as a political culture, a set of visions related to how a society can and should be organized.

One needs to acknowledge that cultures are also very strongly influenced by religion. Indeed, religion has for centuries been the core of everyone's life, shaping our vision of the difference between what was acceptable and what was not [Manent 2006].

Even if cultures are dynamic human constructions; when it comes to making political choices for the next 20 years one should assume that a culture is fixed since it takes centuries (or extreme traumas, such as WWII) for cultures to change and with such change usually coming from a very old struggle within one society on the 'good' interpretation of one's culture [Couroucli 2013].

Last but not least identities matter. An identity is the sense of belonging to a same community. Hence an identity can be a cultural identity, based on shared values, shared history, etc. Such cultural identity is necessary, but not sufficient, for the emergence of a political identity. This scaling up can occur when the sense of commonness of one community becomes so strong that it becomes acceptable or even desirable for such community to be ruled by a set of common rules and/or rulers.

This paper will argue that the EU, 10 years after its biggest enlargement, is faced by a choice between two kinds of EU:

1. The first would be what one may call 'EU 2.0'; a genuinely integrated *political* Federation of Member States sharing a single currency and other highly integrated elements, such as a common unemployment benefit scheme financed by a common budget funded by a *de facto* federal tax system. This is pretty close to an extrapolation of the latest evolutions undertaken in the eurozone in the context of the euro crisis.¹ But in a democratic politi-

¹ As an accurate example one can think of the so-called 'two pack' that now allows the European Commission to have a say on the national budgetary plan *before* the national parliament approves it.

cal regime such evolution is only viable if it is built by and/or for peoples sharing a common culture *and* sharing the same political project.

2. The second kind of EU would be what one may call 'EFTA 2.0'; a loosely integrated *economic* union with some loose forms of mainly intergovernmental political cooperation. This may be close to what is currently David Cameron's vision of the EU. This would look like an enhanced version of the EFTA, something in between the EFTA and the current trends of intergovernmentalisation of the EU decision-making.

This paper is divided into three sections.

The first section focuses on the western-european culture, a culture shaped by a millennium of political conflicts between the religious power(s) and the political powers with such Western-European culture being characterized by the idea that respect for the law is paramount.

The second section will argue that EU 2.0's political project can be built upon what is the historical aspiration of the peoples of Western-Europe: non-domination. EU 2.0 is the acknowledgement that such an aspiration can only be fulfilled via the creation of a highly integrated political structure.

The third section, the conclusion, will try to see how EFTA 2.0 & EU 2.0 can be articulated together. In practical terms, this means that EU 2.0 can only be made up of countries sharing both the Western-European culture *and* the same political project; countries such as Spain, France, Germany or Poland. But this also means that countries like Bulgaria or Turkey cannot be part of EU 2.0 because they do not share this Western-European culture. This also means that the UK, at least for now, cannot be part of EU 2.0 because the British people do not acknowledge that a highly integrated EU is necessary to ensure non-domination.

1. Cultural identity is necessary, but not sufficient, to achieve a genuine political community

1.1. The role of boundaries in politics

Just as a human being needs a skin to survive any group needs to have boundaries to define what is 'us' and what is 'others' [Schmitt 1932]. But a boundary is not necessarily a barrier, it can be a point of contact, just like the skin of one's lover is a point of contact with his partner. Hence the 'other' does not need to be an enemy.

The EU's boundaries have been extended with the enlargements. In each case those enlargements were not only driven by economic and/or geopolitical motives but mainly by the irrational idea of accepting all the so-called 'democracies' existing on the so-called 'European continent' [Schimmelfenning 2001].

1.2. What 'Europe' is and is not?

Europe is not a clear geographic notion. Geographically Europe is a 'small portion of Asia' [Valéry 1998] since there are no genuine natural obstacles between Berlin & Kaboul; nothing that can be compared to the Atlantic Ocean that stands between Berlin & New York or the Sahara that stands between Algiers & Abuja.

The real existence of Europe is therefore a cultural existence not a geographic one. When during the 1956 revolution in Budapest the director of the Hungarian Press Agency told the world that he was dying 'for Hungary and for Europe', he was definitely not talking about a geographical Europe but about a cultural Europe that was threatened by the Soviet regime [Kundera 1983].

Indeed, culturally speaking, two Europes exist - East and West. This difference between east and west has a lot to do with historical, religious and political differences that ended up shaping the cultures of the peoples living in the East and the West of Europe.

1.3. The historical roots of the Eastern/Western European divide

This divide between Eastern and Western Europe originates in the Roman Empire and its division between the Western Empire and the Eastern one. In the 5th century the Western Roman Empire collapsed into a multitude of fragmented political units [Jerphagnon 2012], whilst the Eastern Roman Empire survived for another millennium. Those circumstances led to a very different attitude of the Church in those two territories.

The Western Church tried to centralize its power, adopting sometimes an attitude of rivals of the political power, to protect what was God's against what was Caesar's. The political powers in the West also had a diversity of attitudes in regard to the Roman Church by trying to prevent the Church from getting involved in politics like the German Emperor Henry IV, or by trying to subdue the religious power vis a vis the political one as French Kings tried to do by obliging the Popes to live in Avignon.

In the East the Eastern Church only needed to collaborate closely with the only political power necessary to it : the Eastern Roman Empire (later renamed the Byzantine Empire upon the Eastern's Church request).

This divergence of attitudes, along with some disagreements on the Dogma, led Rome's Pope and the Constantinoli Patriarch to excommunicate one-another in the IXth century [Sellier & Sellier 2007]. The great schism between Catholics and Orthodox in 1054 is only the completion and the clarification of this difference between Western & Eastern Europe that still exists today. Such difference was deepened in 1204 by the 4th crusade when Catholics decided to slaughter and plunder the capital city of the Orthodox, Constantinople. In the XIIIth century the Russian Orthodox felt that the biggest threat to their culture were the Catholic Teutonics more than the pagan Mongols. In the XVth century the Orthodox Church preferred to find a *modus vivendi* with their Ottoman conquerors rather than to ask for Catholic help even if the Pope was willing to help them [Giraud 2013]. Later the Orthodox Church collaborated with the Ottoman Empire (and also with the Russian Empire) just as it did before with the Byzantine Empire.

Even if we live today in rather secular societies it would be a mistake to deny the impact religions left in our cultures [Manent 2006]. During the last millennium peoples like the Greeks and Bulgarians were influenced by an Orthodox religion that puts a stronger emphasis on the acceptance and the constant collaboration between the religious power and the political power - with such collaboration being embodied in the relationships between the Byzantine Emperor and the Greek Patriarch but they continued. Among the most recent feature of such collaboration, one can think of the close relationships between the Romanian Orthodox Church and Ceausescu's regime [Gokay 2005]. For a thousand years Catholicism (and 500 years of Protestantism² in northern Europe) put a greater emphasis between what belongs to God and what belongs to Caesar. This Orthodox collusion between politics and religion is still present today where Greece has the Orthodox religion as a religion of State or where current Romania's symbol is an eagle holding a Christian cross.

This cultural difference between East and West persisted during the Cold War and it can be seen by the striking divergence of attitudes in countries

² For the sake of simplicity we leave aside the peculiar case of Anglicanism which is classified as a protestant religion even if it kept most of the Catholic dogma and traditions whilst now having a kind of loose formal collusion between political and religious power since the monarch of England is also the official head of the Anglican Church.

occupied by the USSR, depending on whether they were culturally Eastern or Western-Europeans. The Soviet rule was hard for all the peoples living under it. But only the peoples of Western Europe revolted massively against the Soviet rule because for them it was more than a political occupation, it was also a clash of civilisation, between Western and Eastern European cultures [Kundera 1983]. Massive revolts started in Eastern Germany in 1953, continued in 1956 in Budapest and in 1968 in Prague. The Polish attempts to overthrow the Soviet regime are countless, especially in the 1970's and the 1980's. But none of this occurred in Eastern Europe. And the most stable part of the Soviet Empire was a country deeply shaped by Orthodox religion and culture: Bulgaria.

1.4. How EU enlargements failed to eliminate bypass the differences between Eastern and Western European cultures

From this Eastern/Western cultural perspective the 2004 enlargement is of historical significance: it allowed the Nation-States of geographically-central Europe to again be fully politically part of Western Europe.

However, the enlargement with Greece (1981), Cyprus (2004), Romania and Bulgaria (2007) were attempts to make culturally Eastern European countries join a political unit (the EU) built by and for Western Europeans. From this cultural perspective one can hypothesize that those four Eastern-European countries may be unfit for membership of the EU. Here are some facts to support this hypothesis. Greece needed to cheat on its statistics and to build an insane economic model in order to stay within the Eurozone. Cyprus cannot survive economically without violating the Treaties of the European Union every single day (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Article 63). Romania & Bulgaria because they lack a genuine rule of law cannot even use 20% of the money the EU has for them (the contrast is striking with Western-European Poland that used all this money to ensure a long-lasting economic development). Again in Romania and Bulgaria, not only does the level of corruption remain very high but corruption has not decreased at all from 2007 to 2013 despite the implementation of EU law into these countries' national laws [O' Brennan 2013].

Those facts may suggest that the degree to which a political unit can demonstrate united behaviour depends on the degree of cultural and/or political unity. For the EU and its enlargements this means that if the EU accepts the keeping of countries that are not culturally Western European this can only

lead to the EU being little more than a “EFTA 2.0”, in which Turkey, Ukraine, Russia and Algeria may find their place at some point in the future.

But what if one wants the EU to be an EU 2.0: a genuine political unit capable of ensuring its democratic legitimacy and to provide a real solidarity? In this case the EU needs to have enough cultural unity, and such unity seems to exist only amongst the Western-European cultures, shaped by a millennium of Catho-Protestantism influence; by half a millennium of secularisation and three centuries of struggle for the creation of a nation-state based, not on a religion (as with the difference between the Greeks and Turks in the 1923 Lausanne Treaty), but based on the definition of a nation sharing the same culture [Fichte 1808] and/or the same political project [Renan 1882].

2. Political identity is also needed for a more integrated EU

2.1. Looking for non-domination: the real political project of the Western Europeans

After having spoken about cultural identity let us now turn to this paper's main point: a political identity perspective. A cultural identity is necessary to *allow* a political identity to emerge but this evolution is not automatic since it requires the agreement on a common, broad political project, a ‘plebiscite of each single day’ [Renan 1882] that expresses the general will of one community [Rousseau 2001].

For the EU, 10 years after its biggest enlargement, what could this ‘common broad political project’ be? The mainstream view is to say that the EU was built for peace. Let us leave aside the fact that ‘peace’ can hardly be a rallying point for the majority of Europeans who only see wars on TV in what they consider to be faraway countries. More importantly, historically speaking, peace has never been an end in itself, it was one of the means to achieve a stable situation of **non-domination** [Nicolaidis 2013]. When France was occupied by Nazi Germany the territory was peaceful but it was dominated. This was unacceptable for millions of French citizens and thousands died in the fight against this situation. They did not fight for peace since the territory of France was under a *de facto* peace. They actually destroyed peace because their real objective was not peace, but non-domination (in this case, non-domination by Nazi Germany). The same could be said of many

other peoples who fought against the Nazis, especially the Czechs and the Poles.

It is therefore fair to say that the EU was built on a broadly based common project: the idea that non-domination is the genuine objective and that European nation-states cannot, alone, ensure a stable non-domination in the long run. This is why those very nation-states decided to pool an increasingly significant amount of their sovereignty within a common political unit that currently has the shape of the EU [Milward 1992].

2.2. Acknowledging that a genuine pooling of national sovereignty is necessary to achieve non-domination

In order to accept a genuine pooling of national sovereignty, a pooling that changed the very nature of Westphalian Statehood, nation-states needed to be convinced that this was necessary, that stable non-domination did require the creation of such a broader political unit. France realized it in June 1940 when it militarily, politically and morally collapsed after only six weeks of invasion. The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg realized that this was an efficient way to avoid becoming, again, the battlefield of Europe. Spain and Portugal saw the European Community as a way to make sure that, never again, would those nations be dominated by dictatorships. The German nation, born in its fight against Napoleonic domination and defeated twice for having tried to dominate Europe, the German nation re-built itself on the very idea that it will never try to dominate anyone again. The history of Poland, the Czech Republic or Slovakia largely convinced their peoples that stable non-domination requires such a broader political unit.³

But this is not so in the case of the UK. Nobody can deny the fact that British culture is deeply part of European culture [Thatcher 1988]. Nobody can deny that the UK wants to ensure non-domination and this is the reason why so many of the British died for Europe's freedom in Flanders fields or Normandy. But, for now, the UK does not think its struggle for non-domination requires a significant pooling of sovereignty into a broader political unit. The last time the British Isles were unable to ensure non-domination was in 1066, when William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, won the battle of Hastings against the Saxon King Harold. Therefore for almost a mil-

³ Even if those nations were not ready to accept being part of a broader political unit that was *de facto* dominating them: the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

lennium the British stood alone, alone against the Spanish Armada, alone against the Napoleonic Empire, alone against Hitler. Therefore, for now, the British people simply do not see the point of the EU. Why do you need to pool sovereignty if, alone, you have been able to ensure something for a millennium that nobody on the Continent has ever succeeded to ensure for more than a century?

From this cultural and political identity perspective the 2004 enlargement was of great historical significance. It was indeed the final end of the Cold War: the moment in which culturally Western European countries were politically Eastern European.

But the 2004 enlargement was also the premise to the 2007 enlargement that exacerbated the key problem of today's EU: the absence of a political identity shared by the citizens of the EU.

This paper uses the word 'exacerbated' because this problem already existed. The 1973 enlargement to include the UK weakened the possibility of having a shared political project which is necessary for the emergence of a political identity. The 1981 enlargement to include Greece also weakened the possibility of having a genuine Western-European cultural identity as a pillar of the EU.

The challenge ahead is therefore a choice between two kinds of Europe and this will determine the degree of integration of the EU in the future whilst also determining the future enlargements:

Option a) is EU 2.0. It is to have a genuinely integrated union. The debate on the final form of the political regime (a USA-like/Germany-like federation, Federation of Nation-States, Confederation, Union of Member States, etc.). Such a Union will be able to make trade-off's between several interests, trade-off's that are necessary to tackle the economic, social and ecological crisis. But such trade-off's are acceptable to the people in the long run only if they think that those choices are made by democratically representative bodies and for the common good. This can only work with countries that share the same (Western-European) culture, the same broad political project. From this perspective this paper also argues that such deeper integration cannot be possible, for now at least, with countries like the UK, Bulgaria or Greece, because they do lack this shared political and/or cultural Western-European identity.

Option b) is EFTA 2.0. It would be a looser kind of union. Such a union would be more and more driven by national governments and focus less and less on non-economic issues. In other words, it would be something in between our current EU and EFTA. Such a kind of EFTA 2.0 may eventually accept Turkey, Russia, etc.

Conclusions: Going beyond the denial of the importance of peoples' culture to build the European Cooperation of the XXIst century

A solution would be the combination of the two options. A core-Europe, EU 2.0, composed of strongly-integrated Western-European countries forming a federation of its own kind; within a greater sphere of loose economic and diplomatic cooperation (EFTA 2.0) that would also be composed of the UK, Bulgaria, Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, etc.

This solution of a two-tier Europe is nothing new.⁴ What is new in this proposal is that it does try to take into account the importance of the differing cultural heritage of the peoples of Europe, to go beyond the current denial that cultural identity does not matter and the denial that political identity could somehow be achieved without some sentiment of commonness, that Alexis de Tocqueville once called the 'sentiment of being alike' [de Tocqueville 1840].

One may think that such articulation of an EU 2.0 & EFTA 2.0 will partially/largely solve the European identity crisis that we are facing today whilst creating a genuine 'ring of friends' around this core-Europe. This would be a necessary tool to use in order to tackle the other crisis that the European States and the European peoples are facing today. For instance, fiscal transfers, via the creation of a common funding of national/Eurozone unemployment benefits will be politically far easier if this is not perceived as a transfer between Germans and Spaniards, but rather as a transfer from one European to another.

In the longer term, this proposal should be seen as a dynamic one. If countries outside the 'EU 2.0' change to a more Western-European orientation they might be able to integrate, someday into the EU 2.0. This might be the case if the pro-Westerns win over the pro-Easterns in countries such as Greece or Ukraine: if *Hellens* finally win over the *Romoi* in Greece or if the majority of Ukrainians start thinking more like the Ukrainians of Lvov than the Ukrainians of Donetsk.

⁴ Amongst many, one may quote Edouard Balladur, former French Prime Minister.

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