
Common Identity, the EU and Streit's Union of the Free

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Streit's Union of the Free and the EU

In the 1930s, Clarence Streit began promoting a supranational federal union of transatlantic democracies modeled on the U.S. federal system.¹ This union would be capable of traditional aspects of state sovereignty, such as: a common defense force, intra-union free trade with a common currency, and a unified government with a common citizenship. Streit's proposed union government would only be responsible for dealing with problems that require action at the supranational level, while member states would retain full control over domestic policies. Few scholars at the time had examined the importance of common identity when creating and sustaining such a supranational union.

It was not until the latter half of the 20th Century – when Benedict Anderson and Jürgen Habermas began writing on nationalism and national identity – that scholars started researching the role that common identity would need to play. The expansion of the European Coal and Steel Community, first into the European Community and then into the European Union, provided the first case study of the questions: Assuming sufficient political will, what degree of common identity is necessary to form a supranational union like the EU or Streit's projected Union of the Free and, in particular, what EU policies have increased the sense of common identity among Europeans?

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Judging from the EU's experience, a significant degree of common identity seems essential for forming a supranational union in such a situation, while policies that require publics to think of themselves as members of the union – such as a common security policy – seem the best way to promote that identity. A pro-integration intelligentsia is also important.

While there are important differences between Streit's proposed Union of the Free and the EU, the EU was similarly created from states without a common cultural, ethnic, or linguistic identity.² The EU similarly does not exercise all of the traditional aspects of sovereignty, while consisting of most of the nations identified by Streit as the potential "nucleus" of his proposed union. The EU also consists of industrialized democracies, has an ideological basis in notions of equality and liberty, and exists alongside pervasive mass media.

Toward a Common Identity

Scholars have often defined identity as "that part of the individual's self concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership [in] a social group (or social groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership."³ On a smaller scale, studies have explored "cross-cutting," "nested," and "separate" identities. But a "marble cake" best describes how most Europeans identify with the European Union and their member state – that is, in an enmeshed, variable, and complex mix

that cannot be easily separated or identified.⁴ For example:

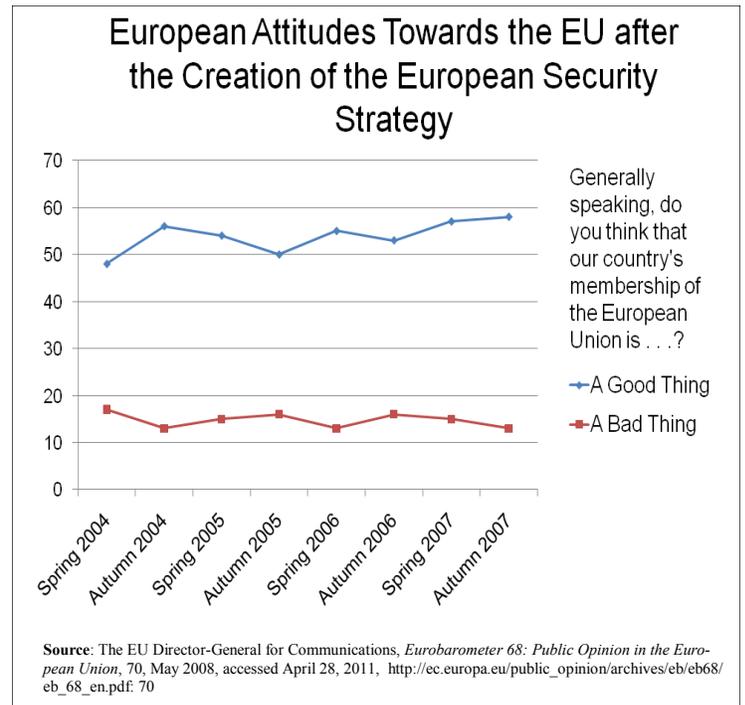
The marble cake model refers not only to the composition but also to the content of multiple identities. And it suggests a Europeanization of identities pertaining to distinct political communities rather than the addition of a European layer to other political identities that people might hold.⁵

Originally, policy makers as well as scholars attempted to identify variables that influence people's attitudes toward deeper integration by focusing on economics. This included studies into international economic institutions and factor mobility, plus sectoral location and people's economic perceptions, as well as their education, occupation, and group utility.⁶ Yet, only a weak correlation was found between such variables and favorable attitudes toward supra-national integration.

Later, when the European Community gained greater economic and governmental power, scholars discovered that common identity formed the basis of people's attitudes toward integration far more than economic incentives. Common identity also influences how a people perceive the democratic deficit in the EU and the success of establishing more powerful EU institutions.⁷ Overall, scholars have concluded that "it is precisely collective national identities that close or open the way for European integration to proceed."⁸ A sense of common identity will likely open or close the way toward Streit's Union of the Free as well.⁹

EU policy makers have sought to enact policies that would bolster the common identity of Europeans, especially since the Maastricht Treaty's weak approval in 1992. The EU adopted a common flag, a "national" anthem, a holiday to celebrate the EU's founding (May 9), and the motto "United in Diversity" – all symbols of common identity normally associated with traditional nation states.¹⁰ Although adopted for economic purposes, the common monetary union also added a concrete symbol of the EU's power, as currency serves as a symbolic unifier that reinforces common bonds. The EU also has a series of educational and cultural exchange programs, the titles of which – such as "Leonardo da Vinci" and "Erasmus" – attempt to reinforce the shared historical heritage of one "European people."¹¹

Some scholars have used the EuroBarometer polls, which gauge attitudes toward national and European identity, to argue that a sense of common identity has



waned over recent decades.¹² Initial readings of the poll data seem to suggest that people identify more with their member nation even as the European Union has become more integrated. But a closer reading demonstrates that Europeans identify with their nation state *and* the European Union.¹³

Integrationist Policies

Grassroots federalist organizations – for example, the Europa-Union Deutschland, the Italian Movimento Federalista Europeo and Federal Union in the UK – have done important work over the years to facilitate the emergence of common identity. Their existence and work had a definite impact on political elites. Attempts to construct a common European identity have largely been led by European "political elites... employ[ing] myths, imagery, and values in order to rally support and to create a sense of belonging: There is a process of selection of these elements according to their potential to 'resonate' with people's consciousness."¹⁴

Often holding key positions in influential think tanks and academia, federalists were able to influence successive generations of elites and push for the adoption of some federalist and quasi-federalist solutions. Federalists also made a connection to the larger population, creating and maintaining grassroots groups that, for greater visibility, were commonly able to organize mass demonstrations until the 1980s.

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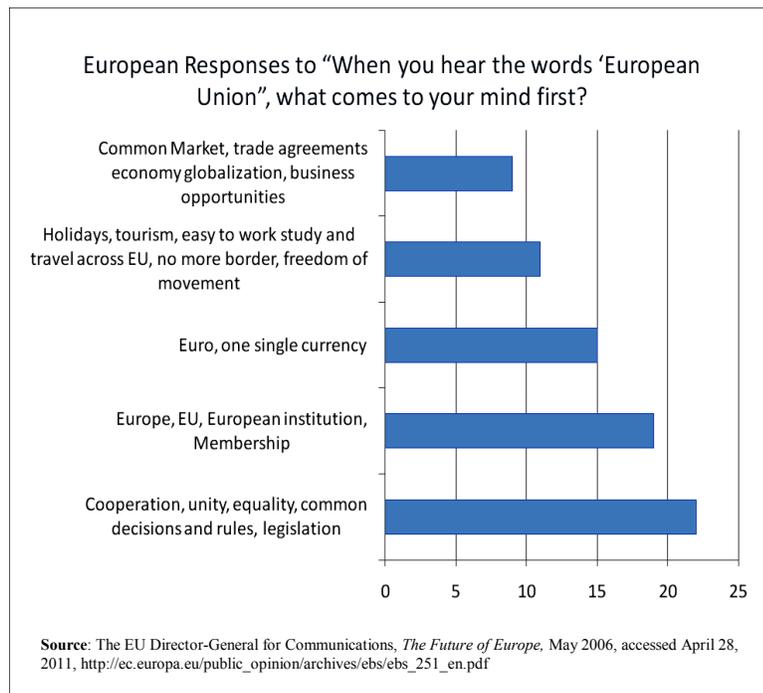
a common identity have been large-scale integrationist policies, such as the Common Security and Defense Policy (CDSP), which effectively brought the EU's people together as EU citizens rather than as citizens of individual nation-states.¹⁵ The entire EU constituency decided what role the European Union should play in the common defense of its member-states. All publics came together to contribute to this decision by debating it in national assemblies, the media, and on street corners.¹⁶ This "togetherness" was reinforced by mass media and political leaders making clear to EU citizens that they were acting as citizens of a cohesive supranational organization rather than individual nation states.¹⁷ In sum, the more European publics are given opportunities to think and act as citizens of a supranational organization, the bigger the political space for large-scale policies to be enacted.

Implications for a Union of the Free

The creation of common identities can take hundreds of years. Deep-seated identities such as national or supranational affiliations are formed early in a person's life: Children as young as six are aware of their nationality.¹⁸ However, scholars have already detected a generational shift in attitudes toward the EU, as younger generations have internalized it as a part of their political identity (this is also true of international organizations such as the UN).¹⁹ And even when some level of common identity and supranational integration is achieved, it will not automatically survive, let alone lead to deeper integration, without appropriate political will and planning. Influencing successive generations of political elites is thus probably essential for nurturing a consistent common narrative, and ensuring future support for supranational integration.

A significant level of common identity will be essential for the formation of anything resembling Streit's Union of the Free with powers traditionally reserved to nation states. And, in a mutually constitutive fashion, common supranational policies demon-

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strating tangible positive effects can create that common identity – as one scholar put it, “a common constructed identity... Can drive states together by providing them with focal points to coordinate their long-term mutual expectations.”²⁰ Judging from EU lessons and practices, it appears unlikely that national publics would identify sufficiently with a document such as a supranational constitution to overcome the powerful habits of nationalism. Indeed, without the incipient elements of a common identity, it is unlikely that such a constitution would pass in the first place. In the end, citizens must feel a sense of belonging and shared destiny, together with compelling material motivations, before giving up important aspects of their national sovereignty.

But the transatlantic community is not starting from scratch. The Atlantic alliance has been in place for almost a century, and provides a long-standing platform from which to create a common transatlantic identity. While the decision to use NATO, or perhaps the OECD, as a platform for building a common identity will ultimately be a political one, the nucleus of Streit's Union of Democracies is already engaged in binding international institutions. Some scholars have argued that a common identity already exists among NATO countries, and

that the continued maintenance of the Alliance is due to the "natural" way transatlantic countries interact with each other.²¹ If this is the case, the common identity underlying the NATO alliance would make it a logical starting point for further common identity policies on the path toward Streit's Union of the Free. □

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NOTES

1. Clarence Streit, *Union Now!: A Proposal for an Atlantic Federal Union of the Free* (Washington: Federal Union, 1976).
2. For discussion for forming a supranational entity without a recognized demos, please see: Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. Willam Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), Part 3, Chapter 3. Also see: Jürgen Habermas, "The European Nation State: On the Past and Future of Sovereignty and Citizenship," *Public Culture* 10, no.2 (1998): 397–416.
3. Heri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 255.
4. Thomas Risse and Jana Katharina Grabowsky, "European Identity Formation in the Public Sphere and in Foreign Policy" (working paper, ARENA Center for European Studies, University of Oslo, Norway, March 2008); 2, accessed February 2, 2011, http://www.polsoz.fuberlin.de/polwiss/forschung/international/taap/publikationen/4_artikel_papiere/2009_paper_TR_european_identity_formation/RECON_wp_0804.pdf; Thomas Risse, "A European Identity?, Europeanization and the Evolution of Nation-State Identities" in *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and Domestic Change*, ed. M.G. Colwes, J.A. Caproaso, and Risse (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); also, see Jack Citrin and John Sides, "More than Nationals: How Identity Choice Matters in the New Europe," In *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU*, ed. Richard K. Herrmann, Thomas Risse, and Marilyn Brewer (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).
5. Risse, "A European Identity?" 2.
6. Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, "Does Identity or Economic Rationality Drive Public Opinion on European Integration?" *PSOnline* (2004): 2, accessed February 9, 2011, <http://www.unc.edu/~gwmarks/assets/doc/hooghe.marks%20-%20does%20identity%20or%20economic%20rationality%20drive%20public%20opinion%20on%20european%20integration.PS.pdf>.
7. Andrius Švarplys, "The Formation of European Identity in the European Union" (PhD thesis, Lithuanian Social Research Centre, Kaunas University of Technology, 2010), 5, <http://en.ktu.lt/sites/default/files/2010-11%2005%20A.Svarplio%20santrauka.pdf>; Elisabeth Johansson-Nogues, "The Construction of an EU Foreign Policy Identity: Identitarian Resonances and Dissonance in the European Union's Relations with the Mediterranean, Northern European, and Western Balkan Borderlands" (PhD thesis, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2008), http://www.tesisenxarxa.net/TESIS_UAB/AVAILABLE/TDX-1114108-115049/ejn1de1.pdf; Markus Thiel, "European Identity and the Challenge of Enlargement," Jean Monnet/Robert Schuman Paper Series 5, no.2 (2005), accessed February 11, 2011, <http://www6.miami.edu/eucenter/thiel2final.pdf>.
8. Andrius Švarplys, "The Formation of European Identity in the European Union" (PhD Thesis, Lithuanian Social Research Centre, Kaunas University of Technology, 2010): 17, <http://en.ktu.lt/sites/default/files/2010-11%2005%20A.Svarplio%20santrauka.pdf>.
9. Ibid.
10. Radu Cinpoes, "From National Identity to European Identity," *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies* 2, no.1 (2008): 7, accessed February 11, 2011, http://www.e-migration.ro/jims/Vol2_no1_2008/JIMS_vol2_no1_2008_CINPOES.pdf.
11. Ibid.
12. Markus Hadler, *European and National Identity: Recent Survey Findings and Trends since the 1990s*, seminar, Stanford University Europe Center, November 20, 2006, Quicktime Audio, <http://europe.stanford.edu/events/recording/4611/2/46>.
13. Jack Citrin and John Sides, "More than Nationals: How Identity Choice Matters in the New Europe," in *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU*, ed. Richard K. Herrmann et al. (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).
14. Radu Cinpoes, "From National Identity to European Identity," *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies* 2, no.1 (2008): 4, accessed February 11, 2011, http://www.e-migration.ro/jims/Vol2_no1_2008/JIMS_vol2_no1_2008_CINPOES.pdf.
15. These effects have been explored in neofunctionalist theory, first pioneered by Ernest B. Haas, whereby integration in one area – the wider the better – builds common identity and thus causes further integration in other areas as a "spillover" effect (see Ernst Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social, and Economic Forces, 1950-1957* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004); Even though the CDSP has not been very active or utilized very often, it was European publics who decided the uses for the program as members of a supranational entity.
16. Risse et al., "European Identity Formation," 9-11.
17. Unified mass media at EU level were not necessary, rather it was sufficient that media made clear that a common debate was occurring among EU member states and affecting all EU citizens (see Michael Bruter, "Symbols, Media, and the Emergence of a Mass European Identity in Six Democracies" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, August 30, 2007); Ulrika Olsson, "Towards a European Identity? The News Media and the Case of Climate Change," *European Journal of Communication* 25, no.2 (2010): 138-152.
18. Hooghe et al., "Does Identity or Economic Rationality Drive Public Opinion on European Integration?" 4.
19. Pippa Norris, "Global Governance and Cosmopolitan Citizens," draft chapter for *Globalization and Governance* ed. Joseph S. Nye et al. Donahue, accessed February 9, 2011, <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrobat/Global%20Governance%20&%20Cosmop%20Citizens%20Nye%20et%20al.pdf>.
20. Jeremy J. Ghez, "The Enduring Partnership? The Trans-Atlantic Community as a Natural Alliance" (PhD diss., RAND, 2010).
21. Ibid.