
EUROPEAN UNION'S IDENTITIES

MISSION AND/OR EUROPEANNESS IN EU'S

SECURITY APPROACHES

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Abstract

The European Union can be considered as the most innovative polity in modern times particularly due to the way of dealing with the sovereignty-related issue among its members. In the international realm, this EU peculiarity explains how the independent actions of its members can coexist with those of EU as a whole. This article aims to finding some answers for a better understanding of the international presence of EU from a constructivist point of view, herein supported. From this perspective, the understanding of the behaviours of a social actor demands not only the questioning of its interests, but also of its identities. Nevertheless, the very nature of the EU, visible in the sovereignty issue, suggests that revealing the EU's identities – and its interests, implicitly, - is neither self-evident, nor easy to differentiate from those of its members. The paper investigates some possible meanings of the EU's supra-/ post-national identities from the normative and cultural dimensions, based on their presence in the dynamics of the social interactions with other actors. The EU's ideological unifying factor (its 'mission') and self-consciousness (the 'Europeanness') need to be identified, their dynamics observed, and their coherence interrogated in order to depict an accurate image of the EU's identities. It is considered that the EU's security concerns and policies – the processes of identifying the threats and answering them - offer the appropriate framework for discussing the EU's identities.

Keywords: European identity, mission, Europeanness, human security

1. Introduction

The European Union is, in its very essence, the political manifestation of an intellectual search for escaping a seemingly deadlock: the need for a larger, prosperous and peaceful community on a continent firmly divided in nation-states for centuries, but whose animosities kindled the world twice in a generation. The answer given to the problem, no matter how faltering it may look compared to other polities, is now an institutional construction impossible

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to classify according to the common taxonomy, continuously re-defining itself, but with impressive economic and political results.

The complexity of EU makes the study of this political entity a challenge itself. In this paper, I suggest the approach of this issue from a constructivist perspective, i.e. from what EU intends to represent and how it can make this possible in the interactions with Others. In other words, I try to find a way of addressing the question of the identity of this complex and ambitious political entity: what it represents, what makes it viable, and how it presents itself in the international realm.

2. European vs. EU's identity

The identity is, in Felix Berenskoetter's words, the answer to the question: "Who/what is X?" [1]. In dealing with the issue of identity of a certain actor, the most reasonable path is to consider its self-definition. According to the premises of constructivism, the identity is a social construction based on contacts with the others. In other words, its identity is generated at the social level and built on contacts with other societies. The state is only the institutional expression of the social identity.

The above-mentioned 'normal' path of studying the identity issues for a regular polity, as a nation-state, can be considered for the case of the European Union, too. At least, this is the reason that can be detected in efforts like those of Andrea Schlenker, dedicated to the study of the European identity: "In analogy to civic, cultural and ethnic ways to construct national identity, we can differentiate between civic elements used for European identity construction such as democratic values and rights, cultural elements including common history and language and ethnic elements based on ancestry and religious heritage" [2].

For some reasons I consider such an attempt somehow misleading. The European identity (in other words, the identity commonly shared by the citizens of the Member States of the European Union) can NOT be simply compared with national identities. There is NO common language, the common history has NOT a common, socially accepted interpretation, and the "ancestry and common heritages" arguments are debatable, and so on. Therefore, I doubt, at least for the present times, that the 'European identity' can be simply compared with a national one. In my opinion, the 'European' identity is (or, I should say, can be) complementary to the national, regional and local ones, and should be considered with its own dynamics, and the analogies with other identity-building processes have to be handled with circumspection.

Hence, what is EU? Obviously, the European Union is, first of all, what its citizens consider it to be. In a study dedicated to this issue, Michael Butler observes that the European identity greatly varies among different countries. In his view, "the main character of European integration at a time when a country joined the European Union will, in part, determine the likeliness of its citizens to feel European" [3], Bruter considers that the most enthusiastic societies toward

the European project are those that joined EU in the times when the integration was the focal point of interest, while the more sceptical ones joined it when the economic preoccupations were dominant (in the '70s and '90s).

In my view, Bruter's observations can be pushed a little further, so that I speculate that the different opinions of the societies about the European idea can be explained in terms of their expectations. In the sceptical societies, EU's importance is considered more in terms of its rational utility; it is visible in the societies joining EU in the '70s and the '90s, all of them having a stable and strong self-confidence and well-defined identity. On the other hand, the enthusiasts entrust EU with an ideological value by itself and a guiding role for building a better future – such as 'peace' (for the founding six members) or 'democracy' (for those joining in the '80s or 2000s).

The building of a common identity among the EU's individuals is, definitely, a top-down process, guided by the political elites and the European institutions. If the role of the political elites was well established in this matter (even only for their role in constantly re-defining the project) from the very beginning, the institutions "have [...] clearly influenced the European identity of citizens by providing them with more and more symbols of the European Union, which have added to the effect of citizens' membership in the European Union" [3, p. 148]. In other words, and it looks logical to me, the political elites' role is to permanently adapt the EU to the uncertainties of the political environment, to its constraints and opportunities, while the institutions offer, by definition, the necessary stability for building a common identity.

The very idea of a common European identity is challenging, even for the simple reason that no one could say how big it is or could be. For instance, do the societies which are not (yet?) formal members of the European Union – such as the Swiss, or the Serbian, or the Turkish ones – take part in it or not? It is also a matter of understanding it. I have already rejected the idea of comparing the 'European' identity (actually, the one comprising the societies that take part in EU) with a national one. Montserrat Guibernau points out that, unlike the process of building the national identities, the EU has never had a "common enemy' as a unifying factor among its population" [4]. The question is, in other words, 'who/what the Significant Other is?' I shall return later to this question. For the moment, I would note that Guibernau makes another observation relevant to the position supported here by arguing that the European identity is a 'non-emotional' one, so that the survival of the entire project could be jeopardized in times of troubles [4, p. 312-313]. David Cameron's speech on this issue [D. Cameron, *EU Speech at Bloomberg*, 23 January 2013, <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/eu-speech-at-bloomberg/>] dated 23 January 2013 clarifies how plausible is this possibility.

What makes the European Union the most innovative polity in modern times is, in my opinion, its unique dual nature, that is to say the both inter- and supra- transnational characters, which supposes the coexistence of both common and national identities. From the institutional perspective, I have already rejected the idea of considering the EU in the same terms as for a state and supported the

effort of interpreting it as an ‘empire’, more precisely a ‘non-Westphalian’, neo-medieval one [5]. Briefly, the arguments for regarding EU as an empire are the hierarchical structure (borrowed from Michael Doyle’s functionalist definition “effective control, whether formal or informal, of a subordinated society by an imperial society” [6]), the idea of a common normative space (from Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who define an empire as “a global concert under the direction of a single conductor, a unitary power that maintains the social peace and produces its ethical truths. And in order to achieve these ends, the single power is given the necessary force to conduct, when necessary, ‘just wars’ at the borders against the barbarians and internally against the rebellious” [7]), to which I added an ideological dimension - its ‘mission’, “that bonds together previous existing political units, legitimizes their subordination to specific institutions, and guides the action of the whole” [5, p. 21]. As for the description of the EU as a ‘non-Westphalian’ polity, this was inspired by Jan Zielonka [8].

In the present paper I intend to focus on the identities of the European Union as they can be studied through their contacts with the Others. I suggest two major ways of building and interpreting these identities: the first is the ‘mission’ – the above-mentioned ideological binder that links together its members and guides their common action; the second is the ‘Europeanness’ – by which I mean its ‘personality’, expression of a specific self-consciousness. Obviously, these two ways of discussing the EU’s identities are not clearly differentiated. On the other hand, I hope that this distinction would be helpful in approaching the difficult task of answering the question: ‘what is the European Union?’

3. The mission and Europeanness

For instance, the ‘mission’ can be seen, as I have already discussed in other papers, as the force driving the external interventions of the European Union [5, 9]. The interventions tend to take place in the Third World’s countries that used to be part of the European empires, and toward whom the current members of EU preserve a feeling of responsibility. The interventions are taken into the consideration when these countries seem to be put in the situation of not being able of exercising their own governing duties. The main goal of the interventions is humanitarian, their main beneficiaries are the people affected by various calamities, and the imperialist policies are simply excluded – the logical end of the interventions is the full restoration of the statehood (understood in a manner as close as possible to EU’s democratic values) of the countries that are subjects to them [9].

EU’s mission, as seen in its external presence, has one important characteristic that I should point out here: it is altruistic. This nature is not only due to the goals of the interventions but rather because EU is open to cooperate with Others able to help it in fulfilling these goals. Any stable democracy – such as Australia, or Japan, but first of all, the United States – is invited to join the operations, for the benefit of their subjects [5]

The other dimension of the EU's identity considered here – 'Europeanness' – assumes that there is an 'EU-style' of doing things. That is to say that there are some important differences between EU and other polities, and this is a consequence of EU's peculiarities. Firstly, the process of integration implies a structural pressure put by EU on its members - as the coinage and use of the term 'Europeanization' suggest. Claudio Radaelli, for example, defines 'Europeanization' as it follows: "Processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things', and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies" [10]. I consider that 'Europeanness' is not only the product of integration, but also of EU's double nature, which involves the fact that its components preserve important parts of their individualities, on the one hand, and that the whole can be considered in its own, defining a separate identity. Even more, I consider EU's non-Westphalian characteristics of a paramount significance: EU is not concerned with its own survival, when facing external threats (each Member State reserves the right to follow its own security policy [5]), or contemplating secession (as the above quoted David Cameron's speech proves). Being not subject to the same constraints, EU's external presence is simply not comparable with other polities' in the anarchic environment.

The Member States have two major ways of following their interest in the international realm: the national and individualist one, and the common one, through EU. In my view, the difficulties in reaching a common, coherent and stable position in virtually any particular issue [11] are a sign of the fact that the Member States (still?) consider the importance of national policies, even if considered within the international organisations (and EU is an international organisation, too). On the other hand, it is also true that the same Member States present themselves as a Union, with its own personality. And the common ground is the ideological one – therefore one can describe EU as a 'normative power' – the EU's basic principles are, as Ian Manners identifies them, sustainable peace, freedom, democracy, human rights, rule of law, equality, social solidarity, sustainable development, and good governance [12] – or, in other words, the same (or very similar, at least) basic ingredients of what I called to be EU's 'mission'.

I think that the importance given to the normative is the real mark of EU's 'Europeanness', its specificity. No other present polity can ignore the surviving imperative, but EU can. EU's Member States are free to choose their own ways in following their own interests, but EU, as a whole, cannot ignore its driving force – the normative bond – at any time. On this ground, I would say that the critics, however sympathetic toward the European integration project, who suggest that EU should prioritize its rational interests in face of the normative concerns [13] simply miss a crucial EU peculiarity. The European Union is not a nation- state and has not its supposed internal coherence, so if EU wants to

continue to exist, the normative dimension cannot be abandoned – any important agreement among the Member States demands it.

Maybe the sentence “Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus”, as Robert Kagan once famously described the differences between the approaches to international security issues on the two shores of Atlantic [14] is somehow true. Regardless the origin of the basic explanations given (the big power disparities, institutional constraints such as the decision-making structures and processes, cultural approaches, etc.), it is clear that there are major differences between the ‘Americans’ and the ‘Europeans’, rather in means than goals. If one can accept the use of the term ‘Europeanness’ to describe only the EU’s action, and not of its Member States, as here suggested, then it seems clear that, once again, the ‘hard-security’ issues are the states’ privilege, and EU has to conceive the security in some other terms. In other words, in order to state its personality, its ‘Europeanness’, EU must develop a non-Westphalian strategic culture.

4. ‘Human security’ in defining EU’s mission and Europeanness

The ‘human security’ approach seems to offer, in this regard, the most promising starting point, as it is coherent with what EU intends to represent. As a conception centred on people, (in the famous formulation given by the UN Commission on Human Security in 2003, human security means “to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedom and human fulfilment” [15]), it looks perfectly compatible with the above-discussed idea of considering EU as a ‘normative power’. In the terms used in this paper, such a generous objective easily finds its place in the very core of EU’s mission, being almost impossible to reject it based on national considerations.

In a discussion attempting to offer a more specific meaning, Mary Kaldor, Mary Martine, and Sabine Selchow, scholars who support this approach, consider that “[h]uman security, as a term, can be understood to encompass the concepts of conflict prevention, crisis management and civil-military coordination, but it takes them further”, so that concepts like ‘responsibility to protect’, ‘effective multilateralism’ and ‘human development’ are also envisaged [16]. They also identify the principles of a human security policy: the respect for human rights, the establishment of a legitimate political authority, multilateralism, bottom-up approach, and regional focus.

For Kaldor, Martin, and Selchow, the EU’s embracement of the human security conception would confer EU’s strategic narrative some important advantages, at the levels of coherence, effectiveness, and visibility. They find three main reasons for arguing in this direction. By the logic of self-interest - human security approach allows EU to increase its capacity of managing the crisis outside its borders that affects it. From an ethical perspective, the European contribution to improving the world is a part of the European identity. Finally, from a legal point of view, the human security approach is answering the EU’s interests in the development and strengthening of international law in

accordance with the global norms. In the end, they consider human security as a way of proposing a European way of addressing the security preoccupations and of enhancing the legitimacy of EU's institutions [16].

As I have already tried to suggest, from the perspective supported here, the 'human security' approach offers, by its very essence, an appropriate narrative that helps to finding a better expression for the EU's identity and mobilize its energies in projecting it in the international realm. But solely the good intentions are not enough to guarantee the success of such diligence. Mary Martin and Taylor Owen observe the emergence of a second generation in the practice of human security, led by EU, who is thus replacing its original main proponents, UN and Canada. The difference between the two generations is in terms of a better and more accurate conceptualization. Martin and Owen ask EU, most of all, to clarify the objectives and means of the narrative that declares to support, in order to preserve the legitimacy of the approach [17].

The demand made by Martin and Taylor is, I suppose, correct in its essence, but I have to make an observation: I think this possibility is a little too optimistic, and there are two main reasons for this relative mistrust. The first one has to do with the essence of politics, which cannot be encapsulated in a concept, so that an ever changing reality demands a continuous re-adaptation. The second reason is given by the particular role considered here for the approach, as an ideological argument. If a 'definitive' stage of identity cannot be considered, from a constructivist point of view, for any social actor, the EU's situation is, at least for the next period, particularly dynamic. Leaving apart the contextual considerations (such as the current political and economic crises), the continuous definition of institutions, it is also a purely social argument: there are only two generations of participants to the European project, and some could speak of EU for about two decades. Briefly, it is a matter of having or not a sufficiently firm answer to the question 'what is the EU?', and the process is, I believe, still in its infancy. To notice a more profound implication of EU, the ideological bonding of the elites and institutions would need a stronger support from the social layer. It takes time, efforts and favourable conditions before one can properly (by which I mean 'socially widespread') speak about the 'European identity'.

To resume the discussion of the role of 'human security' approach in defining the European identity, the 'mission' component seems to be accurately enough encompassed by this perspective, in its largest meanings. The relation with 'Europeanness' is even more complicated. In order to be efficient, the human security requires efforts to be made to clarify the concept and its political coherence, this rationale being valid also for EU's personality. Yet, on the other hand, the very nature of EU could be an obstacle in this regard during the next years.

5. Conclusions

The topic of the European identity is not easy. The well-known elements considered in affirming the nations (the largest political communities in modern era) are missing or functionally incomplete. At the social level at least, there have been only few arguments sufficiently solid to consider such an identity in other terms than as a process in its infancy. When speaking about 'European identity', these facts let only the possibility to actually refer to the EU's, the institutional framework that should encompass a future European society, and not only societies.

The first step in this regard was to take a closer look at EU as a polity. In my view, EU is not similar to a nation-state, and therefore I suggested to consider it in terms of a 'non-Westphalian/ neo-medieval empire', where the common ideological ground – the 'mission' – has a major importance in defining and guiding the polity. I thus privileged the trans-/ supra-national nature of EU in front of the international one and considered the EU's identity in terms of ideological arguments that allow people to regard EU as a whole.

In accordance with the logic of constructivism, supported in this paper, I consider that the best places to look for the meanings of an actor's identity are the contact points with the Significant Other, i.e. the EU's manifestations in the anarchic realm, and particularly those implying the use of force as they are the most interesting in this regard, because they demand an accurate meaning for the 'mission', in a real situation. During the interventions, EU uses its power to help the people (in particular those toward whom EU's members consider to have a historical responsibility) to benefit, as much as possible, of the peaceful and democratic values that EU pretends to rely upon. Such a mission is, by its very rationale, a generous, altruistic enterprise, where the possible partners – other stable democracies – are required to bring their contribution.

The humanitarian interventions also allow the discussion of another dimension of EU's identity – its 'personality'. Here coined as 'Europeanness', these particularities differentiate EU's actions from those done by other polities using the same logic, and are explained as a consequence of EU's internal structure and logic, which ask for a non-Westphalian strategic culture.

The 'human security' approach seems to offer the most appropriate conceptual ground for building an EU identity in the international realm. The ideological demands of the 'mission' are covered; but even if its political effectiveness for both its beneficiaries and the EU's legitimacy ask for a more coherent and clear definition, I argue here that I consider such a thing impossible in the next years, due to the EU's very nature as a trans-/ supra-national polity.

EU is, nevertheless, the most innovative polity in the modern times mainly due to the way it managed the issue of 'sovereignty' and, as a corollary, the institutionalisation of a supposed post-national identity. It is based on a set of common values that defines the entity and motivates its expression in contact with the Others. The two dimensions suggested here for discussing the EU's identity – the bond and the particularity – are intended to offer a framework for a

better understanding of this polity's actions. For the time being, the EU remains a constantly redefining project, as well as its identity.

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