EUROPEAN ELITES ON THE EUROPEAN UNION:

WHAT VISION FOR THE FUTURE?

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Abstract:

When European ministers meet in the Council, they bring to the table very different visions of what the EU is and should be as well as of their country's role in the EU. Although ministers have 27 different senses of their country's identity in Europe, they tend to hold one or more of four basic discourses about the EU's identity: the pragmatic discourse of a borderless problem-solving free market; the normative discourse of a bordered values-based community; the principled discourse of a border-free, rights-based post-national union; the strategic discourse of a global actor doing international relations differently. Can such visions co-exist? And can the EU continue to move forward if European leaders hold to these views? This paper argues that there is one way: if European leaders were to think about the EU's decision-making processes and future boundaries differently, to accept that the EU is a 'regional state,' and to give up on the rules of unanimity and ideals of uniformity which were adopted fifty years ago and adapted to six member-states. To demonstrate this, the paper analyzes each the four discourses in turn, enhanced by illustrations from the member-states which adhere to each of the discourses. It concludes with a discussion of how to re-envision the EU so as to allow for the co-existence of the visions in an EU that continues to widen and deepen.

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What is the EU, what should it be, how far should it expand, and what should it do? These are questions European elites are now asking themselves. But there is little agreement. The problem is not just that the political elites of the twenty-seven member-states differ in their ideas about what the European Union is and their countries' role in it. They also have very different visions of what the EU should be, how far it should go in terms of territory, and what it should do in the world.

Member-states' visions for the EU can be related to four basic discourses: the pragmatic discourse of the EU as problem-solving entity promoting free markets and regional security; the normative discourse of the EU as values-based community ensuring solidarity; the principled discourse of the EU as rights-based post-national union promoting democratization;[1] and the strategic discourse of the EU as global actor 'doing international relations differently.'[2] These discourses are also related to ideas about the objectives of the EU and the reach of enlargement, from problem-solving free market without borders to community of values with clear borders to post-national union of rights free of borders to global actor based on free markets, community values, and/or human rights with or without borders.

Informing these visions are member-states' sense of identity as member-states of the EU.[3] These identities have been forged over the course of their membership and reflect such things as the conditions and history of their accession, the patterns of their participation, their ideas about their place in the EU, and their views of the impact of the EU on nation-state identity. Such identities influence how member-states imagine the EU institutionally, as an intergovernmental or supranational governance body; economically, as a free market completely open to globalization or intent on regulating it; territorially, with regard to whether and where the enlargement process will end, with or without clearly established borders; or strategically, as a global actor which projects its power more through 'soft' than 'hard' means and engages the world multilaterally rather than unilaterally. Moreover, national identities, in the sense of national frames based on history, culture, and interests, also have a significant impact on how member-states construct their identities in the EU.[4] The result is that member-state sense of identity in the EU entails twenty-seven very specific visions about the country in the EU—not to mention the divisions within the countries contesting those visions.

Lately, in particular in light of the problems surrounding the ratification of the Constitutional and Lisbon Treaties on institutional reform and concerns involving enlargement to the east, political elites have been trying collectively to define a new common vision for the EU. But here, the difficulties in building such a common vision stem not only from the differences in national identities in the EU and visions for the EU but also from European member-states' divisions over the policies that would define the EU as a global strategic actor and the practices by which the EU governs itself.

Are there any generalizations that can be made about where elites stand on their member-state identity in the EU and their visions for the future? New states versus old states? Big states versus small states? Liberalizing states versus more economically conservative states? States with left-leaning governments versus states with right-leaning governments? States that have traditionally played a leadership role versus states which have long followed? These are all factors that contribute to an explanation of divisions on identities and visions. This paper assesses the applicability of these factors through an examination of European leaders' ideas and discourse as found in speeches made (what they say) and positions taken (what they do) against a background of past ideas and discourse about member-state identity in Europe and visions of Europe. The paper shows that no one factor can capture the complexity of the divisions among member-states within as well as across the four basic visions of the EU. It argues, moreover, that the only way for these visions to be reconciled is for European elites to start developing new ideas together, thinking collectively about a new vision for the EU—what it is, how far it can go and what it could do—and then reinvent their discourse about their countries' relationship to the EU in the terms of this new vision. In the conclusion, the paper also offers a preliminary vision of what the EU is that could serve to reconcile continuing division over visions of the future, by seeing the EU as a 'regional state' that accommodates differing levels and degrees of membership.

The methodological approach used herein is what I call 'discursive institutionalism,' which analyzes the substantive content of ideas and the interactive processes of discourse in institutional context.[5] This approach is very close to the 'constructivism' of international relations and the identity and discourse analyses of European studies.[6] For the explanation of European elites' visions of the future, discursive institutionalism takes us beyond the path-dependence of institutionalized identities and visions described by historical institutionalism, the strategic rationality of interest-based identities and visions defined by rational choice institutionalism, and the cultural framing of norms-based identities and visions depicted by sociological institutionalism to explore how elites, separately as well as together, through imagination and deliberation, discursively (re)construct their ideas about member-state identity in Europe and visions for Europe's future against a background of national histories, interests, and cultures.

THE PRAGMATIC DISCOURSE OF A BORDERLESS PROBLEM-SOLVING FREE MARKET

The discourse about the EU as problem-solving entity tends to be pragmatic, with membership seen as a question of efficiency and utility, and often linked to arguments about extending the free market or, more recently, to reinforcing security.[7] It tends to envisage the EU as optimally without borders, opening to successive countries when and if they meet the criteria of membership, thereby expanding free markets as well as ensuring regional security. It is the view stereotypically ascribed to the UK, but also to the member-states of recent enlargements, in particular the CEECs and to some extent the Scandinavian countries. Elites in all member-states, however, use this discourse at different times to some extent, and even those member-states in which this discourse predominates do not use it exclusively.

With regard to enlargement to the CEECs, in particular for EU member-states in the early 1990s, the pragmatic problem-solving discourse was all about guaranteeing stability and avoiding the descent into authoritarianism (after communism), although it was also about extending the single market. Those who subscribe to this kind of pragmatic discourse also mostly tend to favor Turkish membership, or even that of Georgia and the Ukraine, with the assumption that the problems of trade and security are best solved by continuing to enlarge. This view of enlargement beyond the current borders has predominantly been the view expressed by British elites, not only by political leaders but the quality press.[8] Swedish elites have also been vocally in support of such enlargement, in particular with regard to the Ukraine and Georgia, as have the CEECs with regard to their neighbors to the east. With regard to Turkey, however, the pragmatic argument can cut both ways. On security issues, for example, the answer could be yes to Turkey because it enhances European security, no because the EU would have borders with unstable Middle Eastern states like Iraq, Syria, and Iran. On economics, it could be yes because it would become a market for other European countries and a source of dynamism, no because it could be a financial drain as a result of its the economic backwardness of much of the country.

Britain

For Britain, a latecomer in 1973, membership was all about economic interests, and about becoming a member of an economic community that was to be little more than an intergovernmental union of states. Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan presented membership as a 'commercial move' to protect national economic interest,[9] and the EU itself as a kind of confederation or commonwealth along the lines of de Gaulle's '*Europe des patries'* (Europe of fatherlands) – which would retain the great traditions and the pride of individual nations while working together in clearly defined spheres for their common interest.'[10] Labor Prime Minister Harold Wilson saw membership as 'defending the national interest against interfering foreigners.'[11] Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who insisted time and again that she would 'fight tenaciously for British interests,'[12] cast the EU as a 'free enterprise *Europe des patries*.'[13] Her 1988 Bruges speech warning about the dangers of 'a European super-state exercising new dominance from Brussels,' moreover, became the main rallying cry for the Euroskeptics. Their message, picked up and amplified by the Fleet Street press, depicted the EU as a threat to parliamentary sovereignty and identity, as well as against Britain's economic interests.

'New Labor' Prime Minister Tony Blair did little to counter the Euroskeptic discourse, since he barely talked about the EU in Britain, but when he did, addressed economic rather than sovereignty or identity issues. Moreover, having promised a referendum on the euro when the 'economic tests' were met, Blair then switched to promising a referendum on the Constitutional Treaty instead. He was lucky not to have had to have the later referendum once the French and Dutch 'no' votes were tallied. This is because, even had he cast the debate as 'Britain in or out of the EU', it would have been almost impossible to win, given political elites' lack of pro-EU legitimating discourse related to sovereignty and identity over the course of EU membership. Since Gordon Brown took over as New Labor Prime Minister, even Blair's minimal amount of pro-EU discourse has largely vanished. On the Lisbon Treaty, all he did was to insist repeatedly that British national interests were defended and all its red lines maintained.[14]

Small West European States

The smaller West European states which also had the pragmatic vision of the borderless market and security zone—Ireland and Scandinavian countries—tended to articulate very different discourses from the British. Most importantly, as smaller states, they felt much more strongly both the limits to formal sovereignty and the difficulties of economic development in an increasingly globalizing world. But while Ireland was a less developed country at its moment of entry, and benefited tremendously from the structural funds, the Scandinavian countries had already prospered as small states with open economies in world market.[15] And yet, despite sharing similarly pragmatic visions of the EU, the Scandinavian countries responded to it in very different ways, having joined at different times for different reasons, having opted in or out of different policy areas, and even organizing their day-to-day dealings with the EU in very different ways.[16] Whereas Denmark, like Ireland, entered the EU in 1973 largely to follow the UK, in which it had a large share of trade, Sweden and Finland entered in 1995. For Sweden the request for membership followed upon major internally-driven economic crisis in the early 1990s which spelled the end of its neo-Keynesian macroeconomic policy experiment. For Finland, economic reasons for membership were joined by security issues related to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Economic interest also played a major role for Norway, contributing to the 'no' vote in the referendum which kept it out of the EU—in particular the resistance of the fishermen and the farmers—although sovereignty and identity issues were equally important. Public rather than elite resistance also explain the failures of Denmark and Sweden to join the euro. But these votes were all based on fears about the EU's impact on the highly generous welfare state, along with sovereignty and identity concerns.[17]

Ireland, although also largely pragmatic in its vision, has equally strong elements of the values-based community discourse. From the beginning, national leaders presented membership not only in terms of economic interest—as a way of reducing dependence on the British market while gaining a large liberalizing market for Irish products—but also in terms of national identity—since joining the EU was a way of being on a par with the UK, enabling the country to determine its future independently from its former colonial master. Unlike the British, in fact, the Irish saw the EU as enhancing national sovereignty rather than diminishing it, and as 'a place we belong,' in the words of Taoiseach Bertie Ahern.[18] There was also a normative element, resonating with Catholic Ireland, in terms of re-joining Europe. Add to this the miracle of economic growth, largely underwritten by the EU structural funds—in which Ireland went from a 'less developed country' and one of the 'peripherals' in Europe along with Greece, Iceland, and Turkey, as defined by the OECD in 1957, to the second the richest member-state—and we can easily explain general Irish enthusiasm for the EU.[19]

More difficult to explain is Ireland's 'no' votes on the Nice Treaty and again for the Lisbon (Reform) Treaty. These resulted not from any deep-seated currents of euroskepticism about the EU of the kind that have flourished in the UK. Rather, they point to the problems of referenda generally, and the dangers of holding them when governments are unpopular or the economy is going down. But it also points more specifically to the failure of Irish political leaders to make the case. In the Nice Treaty, they mainly said that the public 'had to vote for it.' In the Lisbon Treaty, politicians at first told the public not to bother reading the document, that it was 'unreadable,' before then trying to respond in mind-numbing detail about its content. In the meantime, the 'no' campaign capitalized on voters' disparate worries about the loss of their low corporate tax or of farm subsidies as well as fears that the Treaty would legalize abortion or undermine Irish neutrality. This, together with the fact that a large majority of the public voted 'no' because they wouldn't vote for a treaty they couldn't understand (and who could?) spelled its demise.

Central and Eastern European Countries

Even greater differences characterize the CEECs, despite similarities in visions with regard to the EU as free market and security zone. The CEECs all underwent significant neo-liberal market reform under pressure from the EU as well as international economic institutions subsequent to the fall of the Berlin wall. Security issues, however, were complicated by the Atlanticist preferences of the accession countries, which in the early years in particular made them see the European Security and Defense Project (ESDP) as in direct competition with NATO and the US alliance. Moreover, much of the EU hard-bargaining of the accession negotiations were bruising to the national sense of sovereignty of countries that had newly regained it. Thus, although becoming members of the EU was in some sense sovereignty and identity-enhancing, it was at the same time a threat to the newly developing identities of these newly-sovereign nations. This may help explain the backlash we have seen in recent years by CEEC elites against European integration, with the rise of populism accompanying anti-European discourse in some such countries. The most noteworthy have been the Kaszynski twins in Poland, who proved to be uncooperative hard bargainers on voting rights related to the Constitutional Treaty, and then threw monkey-wrenches into the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. President Vaclav Klaus in the Czech Republic has been a bit more diplomatic, but no less negative in his pronouncement about the EU's impact on national sovereignty.[20]

NORMATIVE DISCOURSE OF A BORDERED VALUES-BASED COMMUNITY

The discourse focused on the EU as a values-based community has little to do with pragmatic interests about markets or security, and instead derives from ethics and moral commitments that assume a specific kind of community held together by feelings of solidarity or 'we-feeling.' Such solidarity can be generated by the EU's building a community of peace and prosperity, of tolerance and mutual respect, but also by the 'we-feeling' resulting from a common history, fought through civil wars, or even religious tradition.[21] This normative discourse tends to justify actions in terms of the common good, and allows for uneven distribution of the costs and benefits of membership—as in the case of Germany footing a large amount of the bill for European integration. It is also connected to projects focused on making of the EU a 'political union,' as opposed to only a free market.

Political leaders who adopt normative, values-based discourses tend to envisage the borders of the EU stopping before Turkey—and excluding the Ukraine and Georgia as well—because they assume that these countries would not fit their underlying conception of a values-based community. They subscribe to the notion that ‘deepening’ Europe, or creating a ‘political Europe,’ is only possible within the confines of 27, or 33/34 at most (whenever the countries of the Balkans are ready). These discourses have been characteristic of both Germany and France, by political leaders as well as by the quality press,[22] but Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxemburg also fit. Although there are those who would go so far as to argue for a “Christian Club,” most of the arguments have very little to do with Turkey and a lot to do with ‘feeling European,’ with nostalgia for the original ‘core Europe,’ or with the desire for a ‘political union’ of Europe with real borders and clear goals.

For those who hold this normative discourse about the EU, the pragmatic vision of the EU as borderless free market is anathema, and conjures up what they are most afraid of, an EU that is an engine of soul-less economic liberalism.[23] On top of this, many see the argument for no fixed borders and unending enlargement as a cynical ploy by the British to destroy the EU as a values-based community and/or future political union. For the British, by contrast, this normative discourse of a values-based community and/or political union is tantamount to declaring in favour of a superstate. They worry, moreover, that it will stop enlargement, while too much deepening will produce too much juridical rigidity, therefore also negatively affecting the free market.[24] For other countries with a pragmatic vision, however, such as Poland under the Kazyncski twins, the problem may be that the ‘wrong’ values are emphasized in this values-based community.

France

For all the commonality of vision among Continental elites on the EU as values-based community, member-states have constructed their discourses of nation-state identity in the EU quite differently. French elites’ discourse was all about leading an intergovernmental union. The discourse of membership in a free market was secondary. De Gaulle’s foundational paradigm focused on the country’s political leadership in Europe, with the EU a ‘multiplier of power’ that was to bring gains not only in regional power and economic interest but also in identity, by enhancing the country’s *grandeur* as it projected its universalist human rights values onto the rest of Europe. And no need to worry about sovereignty or identity issues, because the state would defend republican values and remain sovereign in a Europe which, rather than federal, was to be “a Europe of nations.”[25] The economic issues came up later, under Mitterrand, who updated de Gaulle’s vision of the EU by casting the EU as a shield against globalization.[26] As for enlargement, Mitterrand, initially seemed hesitant about admitting the CEECs to the EU club, although he quickly shifted once faced with a *fait accompli*, and then supported the accession process. On Turkey, moreover, French elites are generally opposed to membership. But in the quality press, which spoke for most political elites, while the conservative newspapers focused on values and identity issues, the progressive ones wrote of the problems of deepening in a Europe not yet adjusted to its enlargement to the CEECs, that would dilute European construction and go against the founders of the EU and their hopes for ever closer political union.[27] Former French President and head of the

Constitutional Convention Valery Giscard d'Estaing, summed up the general view when he stated that opening doors to Turkey would mean no less than 'the end of the European Union.'[28]

France itself, however, could be blamed, along with the Netherlands, for halting the process to a values-based political community when the citizens voted 'no' in the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty in 2005. Part of the problem for French political leaders during the referendum process is that they remained trapped in the long-standing discourse which proclaimed French leadership in and EU that was good for the economy and identity, when the public clearly saw that France was no longer leading Europe, felt in crisis over national identity, and increasingly blamed EU neo-liberalism for the country's economic difficulties.[29] Moreover, while the 'yes' campaign spoke to the (boring) European institutional questions, the 'no' campaign garnered votes from those on the left who worried that the Treaty would threaten abortion rights, that mentioning 'free trade' was a call to neo-liberalism, and that the imaginary 'Polish plumber' would challenge the French social model and from those on the right for those who saw EU-facilitated immigration and enlargement to the east as a threat to French identity.[30] Although the mainstream right, and in particular President Chirac, was unable to muster convincing arguments, it was the split in the left's political leadership that was the real blow to the chances for passage. It was not until two years later, after the presidential elections, that there was a renewal of the French discourse about Europe when President Sarkozy insisted that: 'the identity of Europeans is our identity' and promised that France was back in Europe while reiterating that the EU stopped before Turkey and that it was not a future nation-state and certainly not a superstate but rather a 'Europe of nations exercising their sovereignty in common and decided to stay themselves.'[31]

Germany

Germany, although sharing France's commitment to a values-based political community, has a very different sense of identity in Europe. In German elites' discourse, "Europeanness" as "Germanness" was the way in which German national identity was reconstructed in the early postwar period—although "Atlanticist" was also a component of that identity. But this did little to hinder its willing partnership with France in building an integrated Europe. Adenauer's 'Rhineland' vision in which European integration would enable Germany to slowly regain its sovereignty and, ultimately, its unity, became the founding vision upon which his successors built, and which was expanded by Kohl in 1989 to accommodate unification.[32] Since unification, however, differences among policy elites have developed with regard to how Germany should act in Europe,[33] while European integration itself has become more contested as its effects have been felt on national policies and the economy (in particular with regard to public disenchantment with losing the Deutschmark). From 1998, moreover, somewhat more assertive approaches to Europe emerged. Prime Minister Schröder wanted Germany to be freer to pursue its national interests and get some of its money back (although he failed). Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, wanted Germany to free itself from some of the "burdened" aspects of its identity and to move the EU forward in a more federal direction, which is why he launched the constitutional debates.[34] Chancellor Angela Merkel has charted her own course, with a communicative discourse that emphasizes the common and fundamental values of Europe, including human dignity, solidarity, liberty, and tolerance[35] and 'shaping globalization.'

Unlike the French, the Germans generally agreed on enlargement to the CEECs, and were the first in the early 1990s to call for quick integration of the Eastern European countries—much to the concern of Mitterrand at the time—because this was about a history-centered values-based community, focused on reuniting Europe and the need for reconciliation.[36] German leaders have been much less enthusiastic on further enlargements, in particular with regard to Turkey. The arguments against Turkey, however, have been split between the conservative quality press which tended to emphasize the cultural and identity aspects of incompatibility and the more progressive press which focused mostly on the issue of how 'widening' the EU to Turkey would undermine deepening the EU.[37]

Italy

Italian leaders have been even more positive about all aspects of European integration than the Germans, although they too are reticent on further enlargement. Italian leaders' discourse since Alcide De Gasperi presented Italy as the enthusiastic follower, with an Italian-as-European identity serving as a source of national pride, and with the EU itself serving as the rescue of the nation-state.[38] Italy in the postwar period was a country riven by vast cleavages—politically between right and left, territorially between north and south, and religiously between practicing Catholics and non-believers—and suffering from political immobilism and state incapacity despite a flourishing economy and a vibrant society. European integration was therefore key to overcoming state incapacity and parliamentary inefficiency with reforms that, without the EU, could not have passed. The Italian vision of Europe, as a result, is one in which Europe is the opposite of Italy, and therefore to be embraced for its effective governance, rule of law, transparency with regard to decision-making, and more. National pride also mattered with regard to European integration, and was intimately linked to the identity issues. While Germany found itself at the heart of Europe, not only economically and geographically but also as a central motivating factor, Italy was more on the margins, and very afraid of not belonging to the club. Its heroic efforts to join the euro, by finally getting the public budget under control and even instituting a eurotax (the only in Europe), was not only about economics; it was also about identity.[39] Italy's euroenthusiasm remains, despite its bad record of implementation and its more recent soft, creeping Euroskepticism, in particular from right-wing politicians.

Benelux and Austria

In the three smaller founding members, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, plus latecomer Austria, national leaders presented the EU as the means for small countries to participate as equals in the decisions affecting their future and in the markets vital to their economic success. Moreover, their vision of the EU tends to be primarily one of a value-based community, resistant to further enlargement to the east, although they all embrace the vision of the EU as global strategic actor doing international relations differently. Even here, however, there have been significant differences. Most notably, the Belgians have remained very pro-European not only because of the benefits that have followed from having Brussels as the capital of the EU but also because they have looked to

Europe to solve their problems of identity and regional differences, instead of seeking remedies on their own. The result is that they are in a national identity crisis that has brought them to the brink of dissolution.

The Dutch, although also largely pro-European, voted 'no' in the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty, three days after the French vote, by an even larger margin (61% vs. the French 55%). The reasons, as in France, had to do with the ability of the 'no' camp to galvanize members of the electorate on the right and the left opposed to a disparate policy range of policies, in this case mainly about immigration, the perceived impact of the euro on inflation, plus the desire to punish an unpopular government. And for the 'yes' camp, it again was unable to deliver a persuasive message in what was the country's first referendum ever. The problem was not only a lack of experience but also an absence of ideas about what to say, given that politicians had long assumed that it was the EU's role to legitimize Europe, and when they talked (rarely) about the EU, they tended to use technocratic language, making it even more alien from the citizens and not of interest for the media to report on. All of this, together with the usual blame-shifting and credit-taking of politicians, as in other member-states, ensured that what the EU did was largely invisible to the public.[40]

PRINCIPLED DISCOURSE OF A BORDER-FREE RIGHTS-BASED POST-NATIONAL UNION

The discourse focused on a rights-based post-national union evokes legally entrenched fundamental human rights and democratic procedures rather than feelings derived from culture or history. This principled discourse, then, is all about the constitutional order of the EU and its universalistic commitment to human rights, justice, and democracy. It tends to be supported by 'liberal' or 'cosmopolitan' elites across Europe as well as by European Union level officials, and is exemplified by the arguments of Habermas (2001) and Beck and Grande (2007). At the European Union level, the discourse of accession for the CEECs has been squarely located here, in the emphasis on conditionality, and letting the accession countries in only once they had democratized as well as liberalized sufficiently, with respect for human rights the primary issue. Importantly, once this argument was made, it would have been difficult to back out of accession without tremendous loss of credibility and legitimacy.[41] This was equally the case for Greek accession for which, once the issue had been turned into a question of democracy, rejection for economic or administrative reasons was no longer acceptable.[42] And thus, it could similarly be applied to Turkey, since accession discussions have been underway. But here, the outcome remains contingent upon Turkish fulfillment of the conditions for membership in terms of democratization and respect of human rights.

Many supporters of enlargement, including those in the UK, legitimate the 'no borders' argument not so much on grounds of its pragmatic utility and efficiency as of the rights-based post-national union. They fear that setting borders will in fact destroy what the EU has done best, in enlargement after enlargement, which has been to ensure the democratization of its ever-expanding borders through its extremely strong 'power of attraction.'[43] Moreover, countries that benefited from the democratizing pull of the EU have continued to emphasize the principled discourse. This includes both the 1980s enlargement countries that emerged from authoritarianism, including Spain, Portugal, and Greece, in which political leaders focused mainly on the promises of democracy, as guaranteed by the EU and the demands of the accession process, and the 2000s enlargement countries that emerged from communism, the CEECs. But in the latter countries, although political leaders made democratization their central theme, their discourse was also much more closely linked to market liberalization, and security and defense, with divided loyalties between NATO and the EU, the EU and the US, given strong trans-Atlantic ties.

STRATEGIC DISCOURSE OF A GLOBAL ACTOR DOING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DIFFERENTLY

Finally, the discourse focused on the EU as global actor is all about the EU's role in the world, and how it may further its strategic interests. These interests, however, need not necessarily be defined only in terms of the pragmatic, utility-maximizing entity that promotes free trade or regional security. They may just as easily be defined in terms of the norms of an EU values-based community or of the commitments to human rights and democratization of an EU rights-based post-national union. This vision of the EU may be just as much about bringing the CEECs in to the EU to stabilize its borders as about the EU exercising its 'normative power'[44] and maintaining its 'power of attraction.'[45] The strategic discourse about the EU as a global actor is all about its doing international relations differently—in particular by contrast with 'sovereign' nation-states like the US—by engaging the world through multilateralism, by emphasizing peace-keeping and the Petersburg tasks, by promoting democracy through conditionality and the EU's power of attraction in its neighborhood, and by linking trade more generally to conditionality and the respect for human rights. In terms of the EU's active engagement with the rest of the world, moreover, this discourse is for the most part focused on humanitarian intervention and nation-building, and emphasizes the gradual move to a post-Westphalian order based on the rights of individuals as much as the rights of states.[46] Thus, it is primarily about creating a values-based community on global humanitarian intervention in a post-national, rights-based order. As Blair said in his April 1999 Chicago speech, '…through humanitarian intervention, interests and values become inextricably intertwined.'

This vision of the EU as a global strategic actor is relatively new. Although the EU engaged the world in myriad ways in increasing amounts over time, its sense of itself as an actor with a major role to play in the world is recent. Only for the French has the idea always been there, ever since the European Defense Community was voted down (by the French Parliament) in 1953. But it was to be an unfulfilled dream, mainly because the British consistently torpedoed any later attempt to resurrect something like it. Only with the Saint Malo agreement in 1998, negotiated by British Prime Minister Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac, did the discourse of the EU as global strategic actor doing international relations differently (through the Petersburg tasks of peacekeeping) begin to take shape.

National and EU leaders' speeches about the EU as global actor reflect not only the newness of the ideas but also a mix of the three other visions. All pay homage to the human rights vision as they emphasize the free market or values-community vision, albeit not one to the exclusion of the other. The British and French discourses are particularly illustrative of the differences.

Despite the fact that British leaders have in mind primarily a borderless problem-solving free market when they speak of Europe, they have increasingly referred to the EU's common values, its importance for human rights, and its role as a global actor. This was most evident in Prime Minister Blair's rousing speech to the European parliament subsequent to the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands (23 June, 2005), when he insisted that the EU was a 'union of values, of solidarity between nations and people, of not just a common market in which we trade but a common political space in which we live as citizens…a political project.' More recently, however, Prime Minister Brown has said little about the EU other than to tout the importance of projects like climate change. But his foreign secretary, David Miliband has been more voluble. Thus, he noted that rather than a 'superstate' the EU was a 'model regional power' notable not only for its 'openness' (as a free market) but also for its 'triumph of shared values.' This, he went on to suggest, made it ideally placed to share its values even more widely, with no end to potential enlargement, which in turn would only enhance the EU's role as global strategic actor focused on international law and human rights, engaged in humanitarian intervention and environmental leadership.[47]

French leaders have similarly been mixing visions, albeit with a different spin. Although they continue to have in mind a bordered values-based community when they speak of Europe, they accept that the EU is a free market open to globalization with a major role to play as a global actor. President Nicolas Sarkozy promised that France was back in Europe to promote a 'political Europe' defined by what it does, which is about 'projects' rather than 'process.' By calling Europe 'a project of civilization' as opposed to 'just procedure,' he suggested that it was to preserve its values-based and rights-supporting heritage involving centuries of civilization and of European humanism—and to have borders that stop before Turkey. As a global actor, moreover, the EU was to do all good things regarding defending itself against terrorism, mastering immigration, engaging in projects focused on energy, space, civilian protection, judicial cooperation, and a 'Mediterranean Union.' But it would not promote 'pure competition which banishes all voluntarist politics' because Europe 'refuses globalization without rules' and 'opens itself to globalization and free trade but only in reciprocity.'[48]

Significant differences remain in British and French visions, then, but speaking of the EU as a global strategic actor seems to sing from a very similar hymn book. This can be generalized across the EU. Of late national and EU elites have sought to reinsert some dynamism into the EU since the calm after the Constitutional Treaty storm by speaking of the EU as a global strategic actor. Everyone now repeats that EU is all about 'projects' rather than 'process,' involving concrete proposals for remedying world problems. Although there are certainly differences among leaders on how to solve the problems—in particular on whether to try to regulate global forces or not—there is at least agreement on which are the problems and a willingness to sit down at the table to deliberate about them. Moreover, because for the time being the enlargements to Turkey, the Ukraine, and Georgia are still years away, and depend upon these countries' ability to meet the requirements of conditionality related to the Copenhagen criteria—democracy, open economy, *acquis communautaires*, and rule of law—the issues of borders is moot. And the enlargement debates, so divisive in the run up to the Constitutional Treaty, have therefore been conveniently taken off the table by all and sundry.

RECONCILING VISIONS?

One final question: Is it possible to conceptualize the EU in ways that allow different visions of Europe—borderless problem-solving entity, bordered values-based community, border-free rights-based post-nation union, and global actor—to co-exist? Can we maintain a sense of the 'we-feeling' of values-based community without giving up on the rights-based post-national union? And can we at the same time meet the needs of the utility-maximizing problem-solving discourse linked to trade and security?

There is one way: if the decision-making processes and future boundaries of the EU were thought about differently. For the moment, the future is conceived of much like that of nation-states, with reasonably clear boundaries, membership as a question of 'in' or 'out', uniform rules for all, and unanimity for treaties that decide on major institutional reforms, policy initiatives, and enlargement to new members. This worked well in the past, when the member-states numbered 6, 9, or even 12. But at 27, this is a recipe for disaster, as we witnessed with the referenda on the Constitutional and Lisbon Treaties. Today, the unanimity rule, designed for an intergovernmental union of six nation-states, stops the treaty process dead in its tracks while the uniformity ideal imposed by a Commission dreaming of a federal state chokes off differentiated integration. The only real possibility to move forward while reconciling the differing visions of the EU is for member-states to recognize what the EU is and to change the decision rules accordingly.

One such way is to conceive of the EU as a 'regional state,' by which I mean an entity with state-like qualities and powers in an ever-growing number of policy domains, with variable boundaries due to its ever-enlarging territorial reach and its member-states' increasingly differentiated participation in policy 'communities' beyond the Single Market.[49] Calling the EU a 'regional state' is not of the same order as evoking empires, republics, or superstates, which are normative conceptualizations of the EU. Instead, calling the EU a regional state reflects empirical reality. But it is an empirical reality with significant problems related to decision rules created for a different set of assumptions with a much smaller number of nation-state members.

To make the EU work today, it needs to give up on unanimity on EU decisions and uniformity in their application, as well as to abandon the absolute demarcation line between who is 'in' and who is 'out.'[50] This is easier to do than one might think.

An End to the Unanimity Rule?

Speaking of the EU as a regional state without the unanimity rule on EU treaties allows one to envision opt-outs rather than vetoes as the *modus operandi* of the EU. This should not be all that hard to imagine, since the EU has already breached the principle of unanimity in a number of cases, including the UK in the Maastricht Treaty on EMU and the Social Chapter (to which it opted-in as of 1997), plus the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the Lisbon Treaty; Denmark with Maastricht on EMU and ESDP; and Ireland, if it passes the Lisbon Treaty, with guarantees on neutrality, abortion, and its own Commissioner (as agreed in the December 2008 Council meeting). Abandoning the unanimity rule would help avoid the hazards of the current process, in which individual member states have been able to hold the others hostage, delaying the entry into vigour of treaties approved by the others and often watering down measures desired by large majorities in futile attempts to engineer compromise (as in the Social Charter, which was watered down in an effort to get the UK to buy in rather than veto, after which it negotiated an opt out anyway).

In short, what we need is a '*treaty to end all treaties,'* such that opt-outs substitute for vetoes in the 'treaties.' Without the unanimity rule, member states could reach agreement on the big policy issues to pursue by allowing the occasional negotiated opt-outs for those members with legitimate reservations about participation in a given area. Treaty agreement itself could be decided by a supermajority of members—of two-thirds or even four-fifths.[51] Opt-outs could even apply to the single market on initiatives that violate highly salient national interests or values—and granted in a politically-controlled procedure through the Council[52]--so long as these do not negatively affect the functioning of the proposed policy community (e.g., the case of fiscal harmonization, where an opt-out could unfairly advantage the given member-state and/or threaten the viability of the policy community as a whole).

The 'Catch-22' is that to end the unanimity rule with a 'treaty to end all treaties', the EU would need Member State unanimity for its ratification. Without the opt-out option, the Member States would not be likely to countenance the supermajority rule for treaties. With that option, some form of treaty to end all treaties is plausible, especially given recent history with regard to the Lisbon treaty. Ironically, if the Lisbon Treaty were to fail the second Irish test, the EU member-states would be likely to give up on the unanimity rule in favor of supermajorities with opt-outs for treaties much sooner.

An End to the Uniformity Ideal?

An end to the unanimity rule goes hand in hand with accepting more differentiated integration for the member states, and an end to the uniformity ideal. This would again recognize the reality on the ground, that is, that the EU has already given up on uniformity in policy areas other than the Single Market. These include the Single Currency (with 15 of 27 member-states), Schengen (minus the UK and Ireland but with Norway and Iceland), ESDP (without Denmark but with the participation of Norway in the Nordic Battlegroup), and the Charter of Fundamental Rights (with opt-outs for the UK and Poland). Moreover, the EU has also given up on uniformity in territory through its range of openings to non-members through 'economic areas,' 'neighborhoods', and 'partnerships'.

Such differentiated integration is only increased by the 'outside insiders' like Norway, Iceland, and Switzerland which participate in the Single Market as well as in a range of other EU policy communities such as Schengen and ESDP but don't have a vote. It is complicated by initiatives like the Bologna process for higher education harmonization, which was set up outside the EU by EU member states, includes most member states (but again not the UK) as well as many non-EU states across Europe, and was aided financially and administratively by the Commission. This kind of differentiated integration will be further extended by the Eastern Partnerships launched in May 2009, which involve deep and comprehensive free trade agreements, gradual integration into the EU economy, 'mobility and security pacts,' democracy and good governance promotion, and more. The developing Mediterranean Union would, of course, take differentiated integration even farther.

Differentiated integration will be further developed through the various forms of greater cooperation by smaller numbers of countries through the Lisbon Treaty's initiatives on 'permanent structured cooperation' for defense and security policy and 'enhanced cooperation' for all other policy areas (just proposed in divorce law under the Nice Treaty but potentially useful in a wide range of social policy sectors). Permanent structured cooperation, for example, would allow European Security and Defence policy to advance through the creation of a Council of Defense Ministers, an advisory body similar to the US National Security Council, new integrated structures, better use of resources, and more co-ordinated action.[53] Enhanced co-operation, similarly, could encourage, say, interested euro area countries to go ahead with greater fiscal harmonization; allow for the creation of 'immigration zones' that group together countries with similar immigration or asylum policies, for example, the CEECs, the Mediterranean countries, and Continental Europe; and might even lead to the creation of 'pools' for health care provision among countries sharing borders. This would be especially useful in countries where cross-border medical shopping upheld by ECJ decisions has increased pressures on welfare states by eroding their borders.[54]

The only thing yet to be floated is the concept of graduated membership for countries on the EU's periphery which are candidates for accession (now or in the future). Why should not the EU take the next logical step, by declaring that membership is no longer just a long term matter of 'in' or 'out' but also a shorter term question of 'in which areas' or 'out of which areas,'once certain basic requirements are fulfilled, including the establishment of democratic practices, respect for human rights, and a commitment to free markets. For a country like Turkey in particular, a gradual accession process would help avoid the likelihood that in fifteen or twenty years time it would have been turned off by the non-democratic, hard-bargaining accession negotiations led by the Commission, the ever-present possibility of veto (by Austria or France), and the ever-growing volume of the *acquis communautaire* negotiated without it. Moreover, graduated membership would be a spur to countries on the EU's borders to continue to liberalize and democratize in hopes of joining, thus enabling the EU to maintain its 'power of attraction', which could be lost if it fixed its borders at any given point.[55] Graduated membership would also ensure socialization into the consensual policymaking style of the EU—something that was lost on Poland, for example, as a result of the non-consensual hard-bargaining of the accession years—as well as better compliance with EU rules, given the gradual nature of the accession process, by contrast with the precipitous and arguably premature accession of some CEECs, in which politics trumped compliance. And finally, graduated membership need not be seen as a slippery slope, in which one foot inside the EU guarantees full membership in the end—as the French might fear with the case of Turkey. Rather, it is more akin to a long and winding road which gives both EU member-states and prospective members the time to get to know one another by engaging with one another as equals in one policy area after another—

rather than as principal and supplicant—leaving both the time to decide whether they want continued accession into more and more areas or not.

But such graduated membership would only be attractive to prospective members, as well as to outside insiders, if it were to come with institutional voice and vote in the sectors in which they participate. This inverts Prodi's promise to the neighbours of 'everything but institutions', since the institutions need to come with policy participation, and both gradually. Otherwise, for countries in the EU's periphery, why try to meet the criteria demanding significant democracy and market opening when neighbourhood policy allows entry into the European market with criteria that are more exhortatory than real with regard to democratization? And for countries like Norway, Iceland, or Switzerland that already participate in the Single Market in myriad ways, what is the value-added of graduated membership if they do not have a voice and a vote in the areas in which they participate? Graduated membership with institutional voice and vote is important not only to attract partial members but also to ensure that the policy decisions are not only the best ones because everyone has a say in them but also because they are thereby the most legitimate

Once the principles of unanimity and uniformity are abandoned, membership in the EU will no longer be an all or nothing proposition. Beyond certain basic membership requirements—being a democracy which respects human rights and participates in the Single Market—member-states could opt out of the policy 'communities' of which they do not wish to be a part without stopping the other members from going forward. Where supermajorities of all member-states cannot be attained, enhanced cooperation would allow smaller numbers of member-states to move forward on new initiatives in a wide range of areas

Some might ask what such a European region-state would do to identity, and whether it does not actually destroy any possibility of reconciling the four differing visions of the EU. The opposite would be the case, since it would enable countries with opposing visions, in particular those of the EU as market *v.* the EU as community, to co-exist. Those countries with visions of the EU as a borderless free market and security area could maintain this while participating in the Single Market and, say, ESDP. Those with visions of the EU as a values-based community could sustain this while participating in most policy areas or even deepening their integration through enhanced co-operation. Those with a rights-based vision would be satisfied by the EU's continued democratizing influence in its periphery. And finally, all of this would reinforce the strategic vision of the EU as global actor, since the EU could continue to exert its 'power of attraction' with regard to its neighbourhood, to enhance its reach by deepening inter-regional as well as intra-regional co-operation, and to improve its influence through reinforced structured co-operation in defence and security policy or humanitarian intervention.

CONCLUSION

If we were to imagine what the EU as regional state would look like on a map, we would likely over time find a rather large core of deeply but not uniformly integrated members, mainly in Continental and Mediterranean Europe, including some of the CEECs, with a bit less integration for the UK , the Nordic countries, and some other CEECs, and even less as we move eastwards beyond the present borders of the Union. Elsewhere, I have suggested that this is neither a '*Europe à la carte,*' as those who envision the EU as a borderless free market might wish, nor does it encourage retreat to a '*core Europe*,' with one dish for all, as those who envision the EU as a values-based community might desire. Rather, this is an elaborate '*menu Europe*' with an ever-expanding range of courses, with a shared main dish (the Single Market), everyone sitting around the table and engaging in the conversation, although some individual countries might occasionally opt to sit out a course while other groups of countries might choose to partake of a new course together.[56] If we add graduated membership to this, we could imagine additional guests joining the diners at the table for particular courses and, slowly over time, partaking of more and more dishes even as they learn the manners of the table and the rules of the conversation. At the same time, moreover, they, just as those diners who occasionally opt out of a course, would be able to see how much their fellow diners relish the other dishes, in order to decide when and if they will opt in later. The result is likely to be an 'ever closer Union' with greater 'unity in diversity'.

FOOTNOTES

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[4] Juan Diez Medrano, *Framing Europe. Attitudes to European Integration in Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003; Sophie Duchesne, Elizabeth Fraser, André Paul Frognier, Florence Haegel, Guillaume Garcia & Virginie Van Ingelgom, 'European Citizenship Revisited, Session Two: Enduring national differences in citizens' talk about Europe. Paper presented to the Politics Department, Oxford University, June 23, 2008, http://erg.politics.ox.ac.uk/projects/discussion_political/index.asp#publications.; Martin Marcussen, Thomas Risse, Daniela Engelmann-Martin, Hans Joachim Knopf and Klaus Roscher (1999) 'Constructing Europe? The Evolution of French, British and German Nation State Identities,' *Journal of European Public Policy* 6 (4), pp. 614-633; Thomas Risse, 'A European Identity? Europeanization and the Evolution of National Identities', in Cowles, M., Caporaso, J. and Risse, T. (eds) *Transforming Europe*, pp. 198-218. Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 2001.
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[6] See, for example, Marcussen, et al 1999; Markus Jachtenfuchs, Thomas Diez and Sabine Jung 'Which Europe? Conflicting Models of a Legitimate European Political Order,' *European Journal of International Relations* 4 (4), 2000, pp. 409-445; Thomas Risse, ' "Let's Argue!" Communicative Action in World Politics,' *International Organization* 54 (1), 2000, pp. 1-39.; Thomas Diez, 'Europe as a Discursive Battleground: European Integration Studies and Discourse Analysis,' Cooperation and Conflict 36 (1), 2001, pp. 5-38. ; Ole Wæver, 'Identity, Communities and Foreign Policy. Discourse Analysis as Foreign Policy Theory,' in Lena Hansen and Ole Wæver (eds.), *European Integration and National Identity. The Challenge of the Nordic States.* London/ New York: Routledge 2002, pp. 20-49.; Henrik Larsen, 'British and Danish European Politics in the 1990s: A Discourse Approach,' *European Journal of International Relations* 5 (4), 1999, pp. 451-83.
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[8] Andreas Wimmel, 'Beyond the Bosphorus? Comparing German, French and British Discourses on Turkey's Application to join the European Union.' Working Paper, Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, Political Science Series 111, 2006.
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[22] Wimmel 2006

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[25] Risse 2000, pp. 1-39.; Henrik Larsen, *Foreign Policy and Discourse Analysis* London: Routledge, 1997, pg. 97.

[26] Schmidt 2002

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[28] *Le Monde* 9 Nov. 2002

[29] Schmidt 2007

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[46] Howorth 2007

[47] Speech at the College of Europe in Bruges, 15 November, 2007

[48] Speech to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 2 July 2007

[49] Schmidt 2006

[50] The following draws on Schmidt 2008, p. 13.; Schmidt, Vivien A. 'Envisioning a less fragile, more liberal Europe,' *European Political Science,* 2009a (forthcoming); Vivien A. Schmidt (2009b) "Re-Envisioning the European Union: Identity, Democracy, Economy," *Journal of Common Market Studies* Annual Review 2009 (forthcoming).

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