Author:
Dr Stefan Auer
Senior Lecturer in History and Politics
Deputy Director
Innovative Universities European Union (IUEU) Centre
La Trobe University
Melbourne
Victoria 3086
Australia
Email: s.auer@latrobe.edu.au

Title: 'New Europe': between Cosmopolitan Dreams and Nationalist Nightmares

Abstract:
This article seeks to expose the limitations of dominant discourses about European integration. It argues that the attempt to move towards a more federalist Europe underpinned by the ideal of 'post-national citizenship' (Habermas) is both unrealistic and undesirable. The rise of populism and ethno-centric nationalism that endanger the European project emerged in Europe not despite the cosmopolitan agendas of its elites, but to a large extent, in response to their ambitious agendas. A more realistic view on nationalism is imperative for a better understanding of European integration; one capable of addressing the appeal of populist politics.

'New Europe': between Cosmopolitan Dreams and Nationalist Nightmares

Twenty years after the collapse of communism in Europe, and five years after the 'big bang' enlargement of the European Union, Europe still appears divided. While the talk of a new 'Iron Curtain' is premature, Europe's unity is being tested, particularly against the background of deteriorating economic conditions. Elites in the 'New Europe' fear that their nations will be forgotten and ignored by the West, whereas Western elites in the 'Old Europe' tend to worry more about political instability emanating from the East. The tension is further exacerbated by different assumptions about the role of nationalism in the process of European integration. West European elites are apprehensive about certain tendencies in the 'New Europe' which they assumed had been consigned to the dustbin of history. Continuing concerns within the new member states about the preservation of national sovereignty (Ross, 2008, p. 398), along with the electoral appeal there of ethnocentric nationalism and populism, are seen as serious hurdles to Europe's unity. The fact that such sentiments are not limited to the former Eastern bloc is often overlooked.

Why is populist politics so popular in Europe, both East *and* West? What is the best way to deal with it? This article addresses a key aspect of this issue. It does so by exposing the limitations of dominant discourses of the post-1989 project of European unity as formulated in the West. It seeks to demonstrate that the attempts to move towards a more federalist Europe – whether 'The United States of Europe' (Habermas, 2008, p. 87), or a 'cosmopolitan Europe' (Beck, 2006), underpinned by the ideal of 'post-national citizenship' (Habermas, 2001a) – are both unrealistic and undesirable. Whether we like it or not, 'nations matter' in Europe (Calhoun, 2007). A

more realistic view on nationalism is imperative for a better understanding of European integration; one capable of addressing the appeal of populist politics. It is unhelpful to wish away people's concerns for national sovereignty, just as it is implausible to return to a Europe of six, nine, or twelve member states (whether that construct is called the 'Core Europe', the 'Old Europe', or 'Avant-garde Europe'). This article pleads for a Europe that accepts nationhood*s*, a Europe comfortable with a vast variety of political cultures.

I will address these points in four parts. In the first section, I will survey different conceptions of nationalism and their place in European politics. I will also sketch out how deep-seated prejudices prevalent in the West distorted the historical experiences of the nations in the 'New Europe'. The second section that deals with the legacy of the 1989 revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe traces the experience of German unification that fed into the process of European unification both in the realm of ideas and practical politics. The third section focuses on the contentious nature of the politics of memory, in which key EU institutions – the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Presidency – have engaged with mixed results. Three examples in that section show how recent attempts by these institutions to advance a post-national ideal for Europe have backfired. The overall argument of the paper is predicated on an understanding of the political as an open space for contestation that serves to negotiate between conflicting interests. It is imperative therefore to accept conflictual politics as a part and parcel of the process of European unification. In line with this, the forth and final section makes an argument in favour of further politicization of the European Union, which would enable it to better face its present and future challenges.

I./ Eastern and Western Nationalism: a Useful Distinction?

Immediately after the collapse of communism there was a widespread fear that the nations of Central and Eastern Europe would resort to old forms of ethnocentric nationalism (Schöpflin, 1995), hampering their attempts to 'return to Europe'. Many sceptical observers expected that the ideological vacuum that emerged after the demise of Marxism would be filled by xenophobic nationalism (Jowitt, 1992; Tismaneanu, 1998, p. 20-2). For Vernon Bogdanor, for example, 'the fundamental challenge facing the emergent democracies of Central and Eastern Europe' was 'the need to transcend nationalism' (Bogdanor, 1995, p. 97). These ideas were underpinned by an older distinction between an 'Eastern' and 'Western' kind of nationalism. While the former was supposedly based on the ideals of ethnic purity and often took virulent forms, the latter was meant to represent the enlightened ideals of active citizenship, supposedly more open towards outsiders (Kohn, 1945). Hence, scholars of nationalism like to differentiate between ethnic and civic forms of nationalism, arguing that while typical Western nations, such as France, exemplified 'civic' nationalism, Slovakia, Poland, or Bulgaria were characterized by 'ethnic' nationalism. In this account, the civic West is progressive and enlightened, while the ethnic East is backward and reactionary.

It is worth noting that the imaginary dividing line between the 'progressive West' and the 'reactionary East' moved over time in response to changing historical circumstances. Hans Kohn once decisively shaped that distinction during the Second World War; he placed Germany firmly in Eastern Europe; its particular brand of

nationalism was meant to be ultimately responsible for the rise of Nazism. For John Plamenatz, writing in the 1970s, both Germany and Italy provided clear examples of Western nationalism, despite the historic 'accident' of Fascism and Nazism, while the Slavic nations were placed in the East (being only gradually drawn into a Western civilisation 'alien to them') (Plamenatz, 1973, p. 30). In contrast, Jiří Kořalka, writing after the collapse of communism, was adamant that the Czechs provided an exemplary case of 'Western' nationalism (Kořalka, 1994, p. 275). In the 1990s, in fact, the distinction between the two kinds of nationalism seemed vindicated in the violent explosion of extreme nationalist energies in the Balkans: former Yugoslavia became everyone's 'Eastern Europe'. The ethnic violence in the Balkans was contrasted with the democratic credentials of the nations of Central Europe.

A number of recent studies have demonstrated the limitation of civic/ethnic and Western/Eastern dichotomies in studies of nationalism (Tamir, 1993; Auer, 2000; Liebich, 2006). Reductionist dualisms between two kinds of nationalism are particularly unhelpful in relation to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Any attempt to order geographically the quality of nationalisms in Europe is fallacious. The underlying assumption according to which the further east you go in Europe, the more xenophobic the nationalism is misleading. This is because different kinds of nationalism – liberal *and* illiberal – compete for dominance in all countries, wherever they are located in Europe. Nationalism in Europe has been used for the legitimation of both left- and right-wing repressive regimes, but it has also repeatedly been employed as a tool of national liberation – most recently in the revolutions of 1989 (Auer, 2004).

After 2005: 'A Velvet Counterrevolution'[1] in Central Europe?

This is not to ignore the ethnocentric, or openly xenophobic, brands of nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly against the background of the recent revival of extreme nationalist and populist movements. A partial backlash against the process of Europeanization can be traced back to the 2005 elections in Poland (Bachmann, 2006). For Gavin Rae, for example, the re-emergence of the extreme right in Poland was a clear sign that 'the spectre of conservatism' was 'haunting Central Eastern Europe' (Rae, 2007, p. 221). In a similar vein, Jacques Rupnik wrote about 'democracy fatigue' that led inexorably to the 'populist backlash' (Rupnik, 2007). It almost seems as if the countries that became full members of the EU no longer needed to worry about European standards. No longer constrained by the process of conditionality, they appear free to resort to ethnocentric nationalism represented by populist politicians like Robert Fico in Slovakia and the Kaczyńskis twins in Poland. While Hungary and the Czech Republic have not yet experienced extreme nationalist parties in power, their governments have struggled to maintain political authority, and their public discourse is increasingly driven by euro-scepticism (especially in the Czech Republic) and populist nationalism (in Hungary). The Czech President Václav Klaus has been particularly keen to reinforce latent fears of the consequences of further political integration. The current Hungarian opposition leader, and former Prime Minister, Victor Orbán, moreover has largely succeeded in imposing his

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[1] The heading is borrowed from an earlier study by Tismaneanu (1998, p. 141).

ethnocentric agendas on public debates in Hungary in relation to key historical events (1848, Trianon, 1956) and the symbols of nationhood (e.g. the Hungarian tricolour).[2]

The rise of populism and extreme nationalism across Europe is indicative of a growing disconnect between political, business and intellectual elites and – what we might call for want of a better word – 'ordinary people'. While these elites relish a supranational Europe without boundaries that thrives on ethnic and cultural diversity, 'ordinary people' are keen to protect local and national identities. While elites tend to be open to new migration from other European countries and the wider world, the latter tend to worry about job security and view newcomers as a threat. As Ray Taras observed recently, 'even as the EU moves in the direction of greater institutional and discursive harmony, then, the reality on the ground is that it is also developing into an ethnic powder keg' (Taras, 2009, p. 123). I believe that there is a troublesome link between these two phenomena; a link that elites are often unable and/or unwilling to see. Cosmopolitan elites in Europe tend to overlook social problems in their societies because they have developed the 'class consciousness of frequent travellers' (Calhoun, 2002). Populism and ethnocentric nationalism has emerged in Europe not

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[2] Rather than succumb to the temptation of reviving the theory of two kinds of nationalism in Europe to account for the rise of populism in Central and Eastern Europe, it is better to recall that populist politics is not restricted to postcommunist countries; it is a Europe-wide phenomenon (Mudde, 2007, p. 3-4). Citing the examples of Italy, Austria and the Netherlands, Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell (2007) describe populism as the 'Spectre of *Western* European Democracy' (italics added) in the twenty-first century.

despite the cosmopolitan agendas of its elites, but to a large extent in response to their ambitious agendas.

As Joseph Weiler astutely observed more than a decade ago, the European Union is increasingly perceived as 'an actual source of social *ressentiment*' (Weiler, 1998, p. 228). Weiler identified

> a profound change in Europe's positioning in public life. Whereas in its founding period Europe was positioned as a response to a crisis of confidence, fifty years later it has shifted to become one of the causes of that crisis. We come to understand here one of the profound paradoxes of European integration. These very values, which find their legal and practical expression in, e.g., enhanced mobility, breakdown of local markets, and insertion of universal norms into domestic culture, are also part of the deep modern and postmodern anxiety of European belongingness and part of the roots of European angst and alienation (Weiler, 1998, p. 230).

This problem has been exacerbated through the two recent round of enlargements (2004 and 2007) which occurred in the absence of strong public support in the West. Just as these enlargements enhanced the urgency of debates about 'European belongingness', the countries from the 'New Europe' brought into the EU new perspectives that were all too often misunderstood by their partners in the 'Old Europe'. While Europe's enlargement was partly facilitated by appeals to a common European identity (Sjursen, 2002), the enlargement, once accomplished, made a consensual conception of what Europe is (and what it should be) more difficult.

II. The Legacy of 1989

The collapse of communism in Europe was utterly unexpected, but once it happened many observers appeared to have understood why it *had* to happen when it did and the way it did. Social scientists are very good at predicting the past; but by doing so, all too often they distort past events by endowing them with meanings that are much closer to their particular intellectual preoccupation than to the actual nature of these events. For some keen proponents of the EU, for example, the complex historical series of events that led to the eventual demise of communism was due to one single actor: 'Fundamentally, the EU did it', proclaimed William Pfaff (2007).[3] In a similar vein, Ulrich Beck saw in the Soviet Empire's 'peaceful exit from the Stage of world history' a vindication of his vision for 'a cosmopolitan European confederation' in which 'national world (civil) wars can be addressed by separating state from nation' (Beck, 2006, p. 175). For Habermas, the revolutions of 1989 were merely 'rectifying revolutions' (Habermas, 1990c), enabling the nations of Central and Eastern Europe to catch up with their counterparts in the West: the whole of Europe, East *and* West, would now be able to pursue genuine political emancipation. The demise of fake socialism in Eastern Europe could still pave the way for the rise of more socially just societies in Europe at large.

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[3] For a more balanced recent account that also highlighted the importance of European integration and the special dynamism caused by the adoption of the Single European Act – the so-called 'Delors effect' – see Mastny (2009).

German Unification as a Precursor of European Unification

German intellectuals had one more pressing concern to deal with when communism collapsed: the fate of two Germanies. The end of communism precipitated the end of the Bonn Republic, which, after more than forty years of existence, had earned reluctant respect even from those left-wing critics who had for many years contemplated the demise of 'late capitalism' (Lilla, 1994). The new challenge that followed after unification redefined the relationship between the Federal Republic and its people. The perennial question of democratic governance – 'who are the people who are the ultimate source of power?' – was succinctly addressed in all major demonstrations in the 1989 East German revolution. There the initial claim that sought to expose the utter lack of legitimacy of the communist regime, '*Wir sind das Volk*' [We are the people], quickly turned into an assertion about the unity of the German nation: 'Wir sind ein Volk' [We are one people]. The prospect of the re-emergence of Germany as a nation-state dismayed leading public intellectuals in both East and West Germany.

This anxiety was not new. 'The history of the German nation-state is finished', proclaimed Karl Jaspers in 1960, arguing that 'the idea of nation state is pernicious for Europe and indeed all continents' (cited in Habermas, 1990b, p. 206). To be sure, Jaspers was fully aware of the fact that this insight was not (yet) shared by many of his co-patriots, let alone people in other countries of Europe, such as France and England. He was convinced, however, that national sentiments in politics, which he dismissed as a 'false consciousness' (Jaspers, 1960), had to be overcome if Germany, and by extension Europe at large, were to have a future.

It was not surprising then that German intellectuals in 1989-1990 were worried that the demise of the East German state would lead to the revival of ethnocentric German nationalism. They feared, as Jaspers did thirty years earlier, that the pursuit of German unity would endanger German liberty. They feared that the East German revolution was going to be betrayed by blind nationalism paired with mindless consumerism, captured in a memorable phrase as 'German Mark Nationalism' (Habermas, 1990a). Yet these anxieties put intellectuals at odds with their people (Noack, 1991, p. 63).

The danger that Europe faces today is that its elites might fail to grasp the fundamental challenges of our times in ways strikingly similar to the failure of German elites to come to terms with the challenges of German reunification. In fact, one of the key concepts that emerged from Germany and has gained considerable currency in Europe at large after 1989 was the concept of 'constitutional patriotism', first articulated by Dolf Sternberger (1979) and later popularised by Habermas.

Constitutional Patriotism for Germany

Constitutional patriotism, as a concept that promised to solve the problem of how to legitimate a polity without reliance on an ethnically defined nation, was hence ready-made when Habermas saw Germany threatened by the 'German Mark nationalism' (Habermas, 1990a). The concomitant argument was that a unified Germany needed a new constitution to reflect the desires and political ambitions of people in West *and* East Germany. This vision was an alternative to the simpler solution of the expansion

of the existing constitutional arrangements to the new 'Bundesländer'; the option envisaged in the article 23 of the Basic Law.

The speed of political events overtook the expectations of most observers, leaving alternative conceptions discussed by intellectuals without any chance of implementation. There was still one crucial area, however, in which political and intellectual elites found themselves in agreement with each other and with a large majority of their public: a unified Germany had to be even more firmly embedded in Europe. Consequently, German unification propelled Europe towards a more federalist union underpinned by a common currency, the Euro. German unification paved the way for the Treaty of Maastricht, which developed a number of ambitious integrationist agendas in areas once jealously guarded by member states, such as the common foreign and security policy. The deepening of the process of European integration symbolically expressed by the new name, the European Union, was assumed to be the necessary precondition for further widening. In this way too, the German unification was arguably the precursor of the unification of the whole continent; overcoming of the division between two Germanies precipitated overcoming of the division between two Europes.

Constitutional Patriotism for Europe and its Limits

But does a European quasi-federation require for its legitimation a European identity? Might a federalist Europe in utero simply replicate, at a civilizational level, the well-known problems of ethno-centric nationalism: chauvinism and xenophobia? The best solution to the problem of what kind of identity federalist Europeans needed thus

seemed to be for them not to have one. So here was a ready-made answer: as much as constitutional patriotism made sense for a larger, unified Germany, it seemed even more suitable for a larger, unified Europe. Based as it is on the allegiance to a democratic system of governance, its accomplishments and values, rather than ethnicity, culture and history, constitutional patriotism seems to provide an ideal solution to the challenges of multinational and multi-cultural Europe.

However difficult the transformation to such postnational awareness may be, Habermas argued, it simply must become a Europe-wide phenomena (Habermas, 2004b). To be sure, Habermas acknowledged the importance of history, and envisaged that a political community needed to appropriate the universal values of liberal democracy in a way that suits its particular condition; but this need not be an unsurmountable problem for Europeans because they had something in common. Having experienced a common violent history (Habermas, 2004a, p. 51), they had come to a realization that they had to overcome their divisions:

> In happier moments, these sharp, often fatal, conflicts have acted as a spur toward the decentring of perspectives; as an impulse toward critical reflection on, and distancing from, prejudices and biases; as a motive for the overcoming of particularisms, toward tolerance and institutionalisation of disputes. These experiences of successful forms of social integration have shaped the normative self-understanding of European modernity into an egalitarian universalism that can ease the transition to postnational democracy's demanding contexts of mutual recognition for all of us – we, the sons,

daughters, and grandchildren of a barbaric nationalism (Habermas, 2001a, p. 103).

Europe's nations, argued Habermas in line with the dominant, federalist narratives of European integration, had learned an important lesson from the Second World War about the destructive nature of nationalist mobilization. They were now willing to accept supranational forms of cooperation. Habermas is aware of the fact that not *all* nations have internalised this lesson equally. For example, it is historically understandable that new member states would be concerned about the loss of national sovereignty they gained only recently (Habermas, 2008, p. 101-2). But the nations of the 'New Europe' will simply have to catch up (Habermas, 2004a, p. 45). As in relation to the unification of Germany, Habermas also advocated a European constitution that would help to create a European demos for the emerging supranational state, enabling 'European unification to move forward' (Habermas, 2001b, p. 24).

Yet, the proposition that we, Europeans, are all in some ways 'the sons, daughters, and grandchildren of a barbaric nationalism' may make sense in the particular context of German history, but is far less persuasive for other European nations: think of the Czechs and the Poles, for example. From their point of view, the tragedies of twentieth century history were caused not by 'nationalism,' but by the twin evils of totalitarianism: Communism and Nazism. A very particular, totalitarian version of nationalism developed by the Nazis was the problem, not nationalism as such. Slovak commentators, Ernest Valko and Peter Zajac, spoke for many in Central Europe, when they observed that 'the idea that it is necessary to give up on national identity in

order to secure peace in Europe contradicts real historic experience' (Valko and Zajac, 2005). Nazi Germany would not have been defeated without the heroic patriotism, nurtured by liberal nationalism, of all those Polish, English, French and American soldiers who fought in the Second World War.

Conversely, the lasting trauma of Czech history consists in the failure of the Czech people to stand up against Nazism. Jan Patočka argued repeatedly that the responsibility for the ill-conceived appeasement policies towards Nazi Germany in 1938 must be shared by Czechs, who failed to act as befits a nation worthy its freedom. By conceding to the demands of the Munich Treaty without a fight, Patočka argued, Czechs missed a great opportunity to play a decisive role in European history (Patočka 1992). These were the times in which bellicose nationalism was an inescapable necessity; a tragic situation in which Europe's determination to preserve peace ultimately contributed to an even more devastating war; an immensely difficult moment in Czech history in which doing nothing was simply not the right thing to do (Auer, 2008). At any rate, lessons that the nations of Central Europe derive from their different historical experiences are often at odds with Habermas' reading of European history at large.

Public opinion is also important. Insights into social psychology and numerous recent opinion surveys show that nationalism, when it takes on a liberal form, can be conducive both to the process of democratization in Central and Eastern Europe and to the process of European integration. A recent in-depth sociological survey that attempts to assess democratic values in the Czech Republic shows the positive role that Czech nationalism played in 1989 and after (Klicperová-Baker et al., 2007, p.

148-9). In a similar vein, regular *Eurobarometer* surveys repeatedly demonstrate that 'national pride is widespread throughout the European Union':

> With the exception of Germany, where the notion of 'national pride' still remains sensitive more than sixty years after the end of World War II more than three out of four respondents are proud to be citizens of their country.[4]

More importantly, these surveys also suggest that 'national pride does not hinder European pride', rather 'the contrary could be the case' (Jolly, 2007, p. 173). However, it is important to stress that the survey merely identified pride in being European. The *Eurobarometer*'s bolder claim that 'people who are proud of their country also tend to be proud of the *European Union* and vice versa' (italics added) is a non sequitur (Jolly, 2007, p. 174). The findings certainly do not warrant the assumption that most Europeans support the push towards a more supranational Europe. As Mette Jolly argues, 'the socio-psychological prerequisites for a sustainable, supranational EU may not be in place' (Jolly, 2007, p. 173). The fact that the German attitude towards national identity differs dramatically from attitudes of other Europeans has profound consequences for the general applicability of constitutional patriotism. As Jan-Werner Müller astutely observed (in an article otherwise sympathetic to the concept),

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[4] *Eurobarometer Report* 66, p. 66,

http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/index_en.htm [accessed on January 10, 2009]

Constitutional patriotism, in short, is a sort of particularism in universalist disguise – and one that might be foisted on Europe as a whole, if the advocates of a 'European constitutional patriotism' have their way. In a strange fashion, Thomas Mann's nightmare – a German Europe, rather than a European Germany – might come true, after all.

To sum up, it is far from self-evident that the whole of Europe needs to move away from a situation in which democracy is anchored primarily within nation states which rely on a common understanding of citizens who see themselves *also* as members of their respective national communities to a situation in which ever-more citizens would be able to put aside their nationalist attachments in order to come ever-closer to the enlightened ideal of cosmopolitanism. This 'postnational constellation' may resonate strongly with German and (West) European elites, but it is bound to have only a limited appeal in the countries of the 'New Europe'. Just as many German intellectuals isolated themselves with unrealistic demands with respect to German unification in 1989-1990, European political elites in the 'Old Europe', by pursuing ambitious projects that aim at further constitutionalization of the European Union, might unwittingly endanger the European project.

What has been presented here is of necessity only a simplified version of complex arguments in favour of constitutional patriotism. Yet, this should suffice for the main purpose of this paper, which is to address the downsides of attempts to advance European unification through ideals for a post-national Europe. Three examples in the next section will illustrate how some recent EU communication strategies, that engaged with Europe's history, backfired: the proposal by the European Parliament to

establish a House of European Memory; the production by the European Commission of a short video feature aiming to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the end of communism; and the official artwork of the Czech presidency, 'Entropa', that sought to celebrate a supranational Europe without boundaries.

III. The Politics of Memory in Europe

From the outset, the European project was informed by historical experience in a peculiar way: the constitutive other for the future Europe has been Europe's own past. While nations usually celebrate glorious events in their own history, what was meant to bring Europeans together was the unique experience of a catastrophe: the Second World War and the Holocaust. In other words, the peoples of Europe were united more in what they rejected, than in what they aspired to. According to this account, having experienced the devastation of two world wars, West Europeans (led by France and Germany) came to a realization that nationalism, national interests and, in fact, nation-states themselves were potentially destructive; Europe needed supranational governance to banish these relicts of the past. While historical scholarship amply demonstrated the limitations of such accounts (Gillingham, 2003; Milward, 1992), they have remained so firmly entrenched in the EU's self-understanding (particularly in continental Western Europe) that when the elites in the 'New Europe' use the language of national interest, or seek to emphasise the importance of national sovereignty, their Western counterparts find it profoundly disturbing.

Another aspect of the founding myth of Europe's unity that tends to be overlooked in the West is the fact that it was being accomplished at the same time as, if not at the expense of, Soviet domination of Central and Eastern Europe (Cichocki, 2008, p. 21-2). The Western alliance with Stalin's Russia necessitated by the fight against Nazism had a price: just as Nazism was defeated, Stalinism was given a new lease of life and a significantly expanded territory. The post-war division of Europe was one of the enduring legacies of Stalin's war against Hitler. While Western Europe experienced the 'Golden Age' (Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 225-400), particularly in the first three decades after the war, the nations of Central and Eastern Europe were firmly incorporated into the Soviet empire.

'Acquis Historique Communautaire' – but whose view of history will determine it?

Not surprisingly then, different national memories of the Second World War are at times difficult to reconcile. 'There were as many [second world] wars as there were nations', noted a Polish journalist with some exasperation (Krzemiński, 2005). Scores of studies have been devoted to the politics of memory in Europe.[5] What most of them share is the desire to overcome the past divisions in Europe on the basis of a better mutual understanding of various national perspectives. They acknowledge that a credible common European narrative based on a *unified* European memory is

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[5] See, for example, the special issue of *Osteuropa* 6/2008, 'Geschichtspolitik und Gegenerinnerung', *Transit: Europäische Revue*, 30 (Winter 2005/2006), 'Geschichte und Gedächtnis', *German Law Journal*, 2/2005 'Recrafting the Past after "Bitter Experiences": the Shadows of the Past(s) over the Constitutionalization of Europe'.

difficult to attain, at least in the foreseeable future, but they mostly assume that it is desirable.

Fabrice Larat went so far as to call for an '*acquis historique communautaire*' (Larat, 2005, p. 287), modelled on the idea of the '*acquis communautaire*', the common body of European legislation. Just as the latter provides the necessary regulatory framework for the proper functioning of the common market, the former, argues Larat, is necessary to advance the European project as such. Larat observed that a number of European Treaties articulate such '*acquis*' in their preambles, when they list the defining moments in Europe's history (Larat, 2005, p. 281-4). The attempt to design and to codify *one* common historical narrative for the EU that would satisfy all its member states is fraught with difficulties, however, as the lively and at times acrimonious debates about the preamble to the (failed) European constitution amply demonstrated. The underlying assumption, that all conflicts about history can be ultimately resolved through a rationalising discourse, is misconceived and deeply apolitical.

Even leaving aside the question of who would ultimately decide about the appropriate content of the '*acquis historique communautaire*', it is a profoundly misguided enterprise. A unified European memory is neither feasible nor desirable. This challenge has increased with the recent rounds of enlargement, which have been accompanied by intensified efforts of key EU institutions to shape European identity for 'present and future citizens of the European Union' (Committee of Experts, 2008).

One of the most ambitious projects in this spirit was initiated by the (then) president of the European Parliament, Prof. Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering, who proposed in February 2007 the establishment of a 'House of European History', which he envisaged as 'a place where a memory of European history and the work of European unification is jointly cultivated, and which at the same time is available as a locus for the European identity' (Committee of Experts, 2008). Even though the proposal for the museum was drafted by a selected group of experts drawn from across political and national divides and the document was framed in a carefully chosen language that aimed to present a neutral view, the agreed 'conceptual basis for a House of European History' triggered a controversy in which a number of MEPs, mainly from the new member states, raised their concerns about 'a number of serious omissions and misinterpretations'.[6] The museum is yet to be opened, and there is no reason to doubt that it might still make a genuine contribution to a better understanding of Europe's multiple histories. However, the early critical responses indicate that the aspiration to use history to foster a postnational European identity is certainly problematic.

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[6] The letter addressed to the President of the European Parliament from December 4, 2008 listed 22 objections against the 'Conceptual Basis for a House of European History' and was signed by 13 MEPs starting with Adam Bielan, Wojciech Roszkowski (both from the Polish conservative 'Law and Justice Party', a party that recently became a crucial partner for the British Tories to create a new antifederalist group, the 'European Conservatives and Reformist') and finishing with György Schöpflin (from the Hungarian Fidesz party that is a member in the Group of the European People's Party). See

http://www.roszkowski.pl/www/media/files/aktualnosci/2008/34/List_ws_Domu_Hist orii.pdf

EU history on EUtube

In its ongoing attempts to bring the EU closer to its citizens, the audio-visual services of the European Commission launched an 'EUtube's Channel' in 2007 that promises to share 'the sights and sounds of Europe'. In May 2009 a three minutes long video was released that aimed to commemorate the '20th Anniversary of democratic change in Central and Eastern Europe'. In this production, the demise of communism, depicted through captivating images of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, was reduced to a footnote in the story of Franco-German reconciliation, supposedly bringing about a Europe without borders. While the German unification is presented in the video as an integral part of Europe's unification, the contribution to this process by the nations in Central and Eastern Europe is played down, with the role of Solidarity movement in Poland largely ignored. In contrast to the critical responses to the 'House of European History', which emanated mainly from the extreme right and the populist segments of Polish political spectrum, the EUtube production met with fierce criticism from Polish politicians in all major parties. The current Polish Foreign Minister, Radek Sikorski, from the pro-European Civic Platform, commented that he could not imagine that the 'video feature would not mention "Solidarity" and Pope John Paul II'.[7] Roza Thun, an MEP also from the Civic Platform and formerly the Head of the European Commission Delegation in Poland, denounced the video feature

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[7] The incident was widely reported in the Polish media. The quote is from *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 18, 2009.

http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/Wiadomosci/1,80708,6621838,Sikorski__Jutro_bedzie_p oprawiony_klip_KE.html [accessed on 16 June, 2009].

on the Polish TVN channel in a major news bulletin '*Fakty*' as 'an idiotic mistake', and demanded it be 'removed from Commission's web page as soon as possible'.[8] This is not the place to discuss the controversy in more detail; its aim is to support the broader claim about the intrinsic limits to the aspiration for a harmonious consensus about Europe's history and identity.

Entropa: The Postnational Emperor Has No Clothes

Another recent example of a major EU institution underestimating the conflict potential of all identity politics came from the European Presidency. Following the established tradition of displaying an artwork in the European Council building in Brussels, the Czech presidency chose to exhibit '*Entropa*', a collection of avant-garde sculptures that was meant to originate from 27 member-states. The stated aim of the artwork was to celebrate Europe by ridiculing its constitutive nations. Its lessons are twofold. First, the story suggests that the pro-European elites are willing to accept just about anything as art as long as it flatters their preconceptions of Europe,[9] or what Europe should be. Second, the fallout from it showed the importance of taking Europe's diversity seriously.

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[8] See the transcript on http://www.tvn24.pl/-1,1600629,0,1,idiotyczny-blad-komisji-europejskiej,wiadomosc.html [accessed on 16 June, 2009].

[9] This is not the place to discuss the intractable question of what constitutes true art, but it is worth noting that the elevated position that avant-garde art gained in contemporary society also means that 'it requires less courage to exhibit a provocative piece of art, than to say that one dislikes it' (Freiová, 2009).

The idea which the Czech conceptual artist, David Černý, succeeded in selling to the Czech presidency seemed to have corresponded neatly with the federalist vision of a 'Europe without Barriers'.[10] As Černý put it in his catalogue accompanying the project: 'Self-reflection, critical thinking and the capacity to perceive oneself as well as the outside world with a sense of irony are the hallmarks of European thinking.' Milena Vicenová, the Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the EU, keenly endorsed this justification: 'When we point out the stereotypes we begin demolishing them. Making fun of prejudice destroys it most efficiently.'

Yet, whether irony works as intended depends a great deal on the intentions and the credibility of its originator. Artists from all the 27 member states were allegedly invited to critically reflect on their nations. Once it transpired that all the artworks ridiculing national clichés were made by Mr. Černý, however, the ironic gesture turned unwittingly against the sponsors of the project. For example, not many Bulgarians would have found the depiction of their country as a Turkish toilet amusing under any circumstances; but if it came from a Bulgarian artist, it could have at least been perceived as a provocative contribution to an open-ended debate about the meaning of Bulgarian identity.[11] Produced by a Czech artist, however, the hoax

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[10] See the report on the official Website of the EU presidency:

http://www.eu2009.cz/en/news-and-documents/news/entropa:-stereotypes-are-barriers-to-be-demolished-5634/ [accessed on 16 January, 2009].

[11] Which is also the way the artwork was presented by its invented author, 'Elena Jelebova': 'For me, our project is an opportunity to cope with false patriotism and find relief from the destitution of Bulgarian material and spiritual life.' All quotes are from http://www.eu2009.cz/en/news-and-documents/news/entropa:-stereotypes-are-

could only have been seen as a cheap shot at the expense of one of the poorest and most vulnerable EU member states. As for the claim that art's true role is to engage in daring provocations: provocative this piece might have been with respect to the constitutive nations of the EU, but not in relation to pro-European elites. For example, the Czech segment of the sculpture merely ridiculed Václav Klaus, who is surely not popular in Brussels (Weiss, 2009).

Advancing a vision for a Europe in which its constitutive nations would no longer care about their identity, *Entropa* is (unwittingly) also revealing in its title. Its allusion to 'entropy', a key term in thermodynamics, will serve to illustrate one of the key arguments of this article. The highest level of entropy, described also as 'heat death', is reached in a closed system when temperature is equally distributed. Entropy applied to Europe can be equated with the death of politics. If all the conflicting interests between the nations of Europe as well as their individual citizens could be ultimately resolved through a rational discourse, we would eventually reach a technocratic situation in which politics becomes redundant. A truly post-national Europe would thus become a post-political Europe.

But what of the other alternative: a Europe of nation states competing for influence? Will a Europe in which nations are increasingly asserting their sovereignty end up as any number of multinational empires in the past? Will it end up reliving its worst nightmares?

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barriers-to-be-demolished-5634/ [accessed on 16 January, 2009], a website that was removed from the server once the hoax had been exposed.

Krastev's Nightmare: Yugoslavia as a Precursor of Europe's Disintegration

The Bulgarian political scientist, Ivan Krastev, urges Europeans to consider the dystopic scenario of disintegrating Yugoslavia. While acknowledging a number of fundamental differences, which appear to make communist Yugoslavia an inappropriate point of reference for any problems that the EU is currently confronting, he listed a number of disturbing similarities:

> Tito's Yugoslavia was torn apart by a lack of solidarity. … The EU today is also threatened by the deficit of solidarity. The richer states and regions in the EU are less and less willing to share with the poorer, and old European member states are becoming hostile and suspicious to the newcomers. Yugoslavia collapsed because its political and intellectual elites underestimated the power of national sentiments and managed falsely to convince themselves that ethnic nationalism is something from the past. The EU elites are making the same mistake (Krastev, forthcoming).

Krastev also points out that the EU, like Yugoslavia in the 1980s, is no longer certain of its ultimate purpose; it seems unable to agree on a unifying narrative. To be sure, Yugoslavia was never a democratic state and its very existence was predicated on the particular geopolitical constellation during the Cold War: its peculiar status as a non-aligned power gave it a sense of purpose. But to say that Yugoslavia was destined to fail from the outset would amount to a backward reading of history. Even the construct of Yugoslav identity had some appeal particularly amongst the urban elites. Yet the comparison between the EU and the Yugoslav federation has very serious

limitations when it comes to the basic question of legitimacy. Yugoslavia was not democratic, while Europe is. It must never be forgotten that all members of the European Union joined the union out of free will, whatever their motivation for membership might have been. It is also beyond question that every country is free to leave. A war for the preservation of the European Union is inconceivable.

Concluding remarks: Return of (conflictual) Politics to European Politics

Yet, these are extreme, and false choices. Europe should not be choosing between Habermas' post-national, post-political, consensual paradise and the hell that was disintegrating Yugoslavia.

There are other options. What is no longer feasible is to continue in the process as before. The initial method of Europe's unification, in which enlightened elites were able to pursue ambitious integrationist projects on the assumption that 'ordinary people' would eventually appreciate its advantages, no longer applies: the times of the permissive consensus are gone.

The contention of this paper is that the EU enthusiasts, owing partly to their distorted views of Europe's past and their unrealistic expectations about its future, may well be contributing to the demise of that very Europe they favour. A Europe of 27 and more member states is by necessity more heterogenous, diverse and more difficult to

govern. However, it is important to stop seeing this as a burden that is to be overcome. It should be seen as an opportunity: more disputes bring on more politics.[12]

Habermas' conception of politics based on communicative rationality is flawed. Ralf Dahrendorf contrasts Habermas' 'utopian dreams of harmony accomplished through the discourse of non-domination' (Dahrendorf, 2003, p. 139) with a Kantian understanding of politics that does not shy away from conflicts:

> Without conflict 'all talents would remain hidden, unborn in an Arcadian shepherd's life, with all its concord, contentment, and mutual affection. Men, good-natured as the sheep they herd, would hardly reach a higher worth than their beasts ... Thanks be to Nature, then, for the incompatibility, for heartless competitive vanity, for the insatiable desire to possess and to rule! Man wishes concord; but Nature knows better what is good for the race; she wills discord.' (Dahrendorf, 2003, p. 135; Kant, 1998, p. 42[1784])

To prevent misunderstandings: this article does not advocate confrontation and strife in Europe. Instead, it merely calls for a more realistic view on European politics that is based on the insight that politics is fundamentally about dealing with conflicts. This is also the way in which the 'New Europe' can further shape Europe's future. Europe needs to engage its citizens by making its polity more political; that is by opening it to

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[12] This is the kind of politics that resonates with Zielonka's proposition for a 'plurilateral mode of governance' that seeks to embrace more flexible and decentralized arrangements congenial to 'highly heterogeneous polities such as the current EU' (Zielonka 2007, p. 205).

fierce political contestation about its aims, and the ways how best to achieve these aims. The peoples of Europe need to be presented with different choices about the future of Europe. Through this Europe should be re-politicised (Hix, 2008). This why the elites in the 'Old Europe' need to overcome their fear of the New Europe and embrace the conflictual nature of politics in a Europe to come.

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