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Nation-state and the European Union: Lost in a Battle for Identity

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Summary

This article, based on studies of nationalism, discusses identity formation in the European Union and compares it to the nation-state. The starting point is that for all its economic benefits and political innovation, the EU is failing to provide people with the sense of belonging and extract political loyalty. By exploring what function identity serves – for the nation-state in the past and for the EU in the present – it is argued that while there are limits to the EU's ability to project a meaningful European identity, there are also limits to the nation-state's ability to meet the political challenges of contemporary societies. One way, and possibly the only way out of this 'battle for identity' is to acknowledge the real impact of the EU on the nation-state and open an honest debate by both European and national elites about which challenges of our time can be met by the EU and which are better kept at the national level. A better understanding of how people's national aspirations, concerns and political demands are mediated between different levels of governance may lead to adapting their identities accordingly – loyalty and passion for the EU may follow too.

Keywords: nation-state, nationalism, national identity, European Union, European identity

Introduction

Since the arrival of the European Union (henceforth, the EU) the long-standing romance between the nation and the state (Luban, 1980) has been disturbed. The pathos and the glory of the nation, the power of the state and the beauty of its terri-

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tory were brought together by nationalism which created a sovereign nation-state in which not only the state was sovereign, but the nation too. The 'national soul', reflecting people's traditions, history and unity (Luban, 1980: 392), coupled with the entitlements of citizenship became the expression of the modern age. The premise of the unwavering support and indissoluble interdependence between the nation and its state has been broken by the EU, which is accused of diminishing a state's sovereignty and diluting national identities. The EU for all its economic benefits and political innovation is struggling to match the romance of the nation-state; European citizenry remains indifferent to the idea of European identity. On the other hand, the nation-state, entangled as it is in European integration, has lost some of its power and the question is whether its monopoly on people's loyalty and sense of belonging can, long-term, survive European integration – undiminished. Consequently, both the nation-state and the EU are lost in the battle for identity, the former to maintain it, the latter to obtain it.

What follows explores what function identity serves – for the nation-state in the past and for the EU in the present – and what are the implications of the 'battle' for identity for both the national state and the EU. I argue that the European Union and the nation-state are not only different political entities which are locked into a mutually dependent relationship, but that perceptions about their historical and political role are also different: if the major achievement of the nation-state has been the elevation of nationality, *de facto* the elevation of ethnic identity into a political organisation of the state coupled with sovereign power over the territory and citizens' political destiny, the European Union is seeking to de-couple nationality, territory and sovereignty.

I shall develop my argument mainly from the general literature on identity and nationalism which I take to be the main force behind the nation-state's monopoly on the political and cultural identity of European citizenry. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) argue that the concept of identity is too 'ambiguous' and 'riddled with contradictory meanings' to serve as an analytical concept. While accepting their argument, it is the ambiguity of the concept of identity what adds to its relevance in the present discussion. Hence, following Brubaker and Cooper, identity is linked to an identification with a group, thus in this article, identity stands for a 'collective self-understanding of a group characterised by 'sameness' and a solidarity based on some shared attributes which can be objectively observed, but also characterised by their subjective reflection in a group's consciousness' (Harris, 2009: 82). Obviously, there are many groups that would fit this description, for example, class, gender, sexual orientation, profession and so on, but in the present context, I am referring to 'the nation' and the identity derived from membership in it, shared historical experience and the role of the nation-state in cementing this identity as a powerful

socio-political category. I will examine the role and the character of the nation-state in the past and in the present and use it as a springboard for arguing that solutions to the challenges of our time are fast escaping its confines. In the process, the concepts of identity, sovereignty and democracy will be unpicked. I then turn to the EU and explore its pursuit of a non-national political community with a corresponding identity. In comparing the ideological projects of the nation-state and the EU, I conclude that both the contemporary nation-state and the European Union need new answers to the old question of identity in order to project credible and complementary identities for our time.

Nationalism: Merging of Ethnicity, Nationhood and Statehood

The emergence of the nation-state was not a political inevitability, but a political organisation which evolved in response to historical and political necessities of its time (Gellner, 1994; Mann, 1995; Harris, 2009). This formation married culture, politics and social development when industrialisation and secularisation altered the expectations and aspirations of people and the position of rulers. Nations and states, as we know them now, are a result of slow and painful historical processes. Should the current nation-state no longer correspond with aspirations and expectations of contemporary societies and consistently fail to provide answers to societal pressures, the adaptation of the relationship between nations and states will be an equally long and painful process. Before I argue that we are observing a beginning of this process, a reminder of the genesis of the currently somewhat beleaguered nation-state is in order.

The nation as a category of collective identity is important to human existence in both cultural and political terms. How important depends on an individual's beliefs, experiences, political conditions, geographic setting and historical development. While nations as cultural entities have always provided a degree of emotional and cultural sustenance, and enhancement of self-esteem through collective membership, since the 18th century the nation has come to represent political legitimacy and political power in the form of the sovereign nation-state. European peoples' understanding of culture and politics has thus been intimately linked to national cultures and the symbolism of those cultures. The 'how' and the 'why' have been the subjects of a huge body of literature and contestation among academics, historians and nations themselves, but can be encompassed by one word – nationalism (Breuilly, 1993; Özkirimli, 2000).

There are many definitions of nationalism, too many to repeat here, but the essence of all nationalism rests on the idea that there is a distinct cultural group which inhabits a distinct territory and that this group, by virtue of its cultural distinction, is entitled to recognition and some form of autonomous government. So, national-

ism's actions are 'designed to render the boundaries of the nation congruent with those of its governance unit' (Hechter, 2000: 7) or as the most commonly used definition of nationalism asserts, it is 'primarily a political principle which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent' (Gellner, 1994: 1). Nationalism is an ideology as well as a sentiment: it has a vision for the future of the society, but unlike other ideologies, nationalism is less concerned with 'how' society is governed and more with 'who' governs it (Harris, 2009: 24).

Nationalism makes appeals to the perpetuity of the nation which makes us who we are, to the 'soul' of the nation which requires love and nourishment to fulfil its destiny. Nationalism, over and above being a sentiment and an ideology, is then also a political strategy for commanding the relationship between 'the nation' and the state. The strategy may change depending on history and circumstances, ideologies also come and go, but the core objective of nationalism that the nation and the state remain sovereign, is not changing. That alone affords nationalism a unique political position whereby it serves as an identifier of the nation's place in the world and as the guardian of the nation's continuity, legitimacy, and interests (Brubaker, 1998: 292).

Nationalism identifies the group, it cements its identity and provides 'the people' with a story which is necessary for the maintenance of the nation-state. Particularly in times of change, cultural (who we are) and institutional discourses (how we do things) become mutually reinforcing in producing unity, commitment and the energy for tasks ahead. When we are talking about a nation-state, we are talking about a political project which describes and legitimizes a number of assumptions articulated and promoted by nationalism. These assumptions are:

- a) cultural and historical distinctiveness entitles the group (*ethnos*) to a government by its people for its people, preferably in an independent state of and for the nation, or at the minimum, to a degree of autonomy within another nation-state;
- b) the nation's existence as a separate territorial and political entity (the principle of national self-determination) has a moral validity because belonging to a nation and its survival are ethical and moral principles;
- c) maintaining, producing and reproducing the national narrative (national identity) is of utmost importance because the nation formation is purportedly the culmination of a long and ongoing process which may stagnate or be accelerated at times, but whatever the fortunes and misfortunes of the national project – the nation has a destiny;
- d) the nation-state, thus furnished by nationalism, is the legitimate political unit for solidarity, sovereignty and the exercise of democracy.

The fact that there are hardly any true nation-states (of and for one nation) and that the majority of nation-states comprise more than one national group is a different argument to the one I am pursuing here. We may be witnessing increased displacement of people, we may be promoting cosmopolitan virtues, the nation-state may be enmeshed in a complex network of international organisations and institutions, but, at this stage in history, the nation-state remains to be perceived as the main protector of cultural and physical security of people and the main framework for the distribution of material and cultural resources. The manufacture of national symbols and the maintenance of national identity are nearly synonymous and enhanced by a deliberate effort to construct an overarching collective identity pertaining to the national state. It stands to reason that symbols inhabiting our cultural and political consciousness are those of the nation-state, that the nation-state has monopolized the concept of identity, and that there is little ambiguity about its role in politics. If nationalism is a prism through which we view the world – at this stage in history divided into national states – every other prism needs to offer similar, if not better reasons for emotional and political commitment. These traits of nationalism are therefore precisely the obstacles to accepting the EU as a new political entity worth investing with a similar commitment.

Nation-state: Conflating Identity, Sovereignty and Democracy

The successful merger of ethnicity, nationhood and statehood created the nation-state which represents another trinity of precious political goods: identity, democracy and sovereignty. There is a long-standing assumption that these are mutually reinforcing, while there are actually very different and not necessarily mutually reinforcing categories. Identity can be maintained in a non-democratic system as well as in a democratic one (in fact, it is democracy that can provide protection of ethnic identities better than other political systems). Sovereignty has very little to do with either identity or democracy, as many non-democratic sovereign states where non-dominant cultures are suppressed have amply demonstrated throughout history. So, why the confusion about the intrinsic link between identity, democracy and sovereignty, and why is it important in the argument about the relationship between the nation-state and the EU?

If the nation-state is the most evident framework for identity and sovereignty of the national group, there are some interrelated questions in need of further probing: how is the group determined and where does that leave democracy? The determination of the national group is mostly based on its ethnic background. In the system of nation-states there is no escape from the cultural domination of the political community which gave the name to the state. This is the success of the nation-state and it may also be its demise, because the contemporary nation-state can no longer

successfully fulfil its traditional role of producing national identity while homogenizing the population around the national story aimed at the unity of the political community. One ought to be cautious not to foretell the end of the nation-state when it still holds the vital cards in the play for people's sense of identity and their understanding of politics and democracy. Nationalism and democracy are pivotal among ideologies of modernity because, despite the obvious tension deriving from the different objectives they seek, there is a fundamental historical and ideological congruence between them. Both nationalism and democracy are rooted in the idea that all political authority stems from 'the people' (Harris, 2009: 129). 'The people' stands for popular sovereignty and participation from below, rights, beliefs, expectations and interests; in short, the traditional understanding of democracy is that its exercise requires a clearly defined legitimate political unit – a territorial state – in which it is clear who the 'players' (*demos*) are and where the boundaries of the 'playing field' are (Lord and Harris, 2004: 32). Thus, the 'nation', with its definition, its boundaries and its symbols, is not only an integral part of nationalist politics, but it is an integral part of national sovereignty, political legitimacy and the general understanding of democracy too.

European Identity: Elusive, Emergent or Hollow?

Having argued the all-pervading national understanding of political identities, it is time to assert that the perception may be stronger than the reality. The EU, in its sixth decade of perpetual struggle for more effective integration, more legitimacy and greater authority, while still enlarging, since recently, into Eastern and Central Europe where the nation-state has barely managed to assert its sovereignty, is an impressive success. In terms of people's affection for the EU and political commitment to it, there is a degree of apathy. When compared to the nation-state, the apathy about the EU can be traced firstly to the lack of emotional pull that the EU can exert from citizens whose loyalty appears to be placed within nation-states, and secondly to the confusion about its aims and structures in the face of near clarity within the nation-state. The third reason which is beyond the scope of this discussion refers to an inadequate understanding of the nation-state's collusion with the EU as a way of securing its survival (Milward, 1984).

The nation and the state are two different categories. The conflation of belonging (nationhood) and organisational framework (statehood) in the form of an ethno-national state has been, at times, politically disastrous and is becoming less and less helpful for the politics of our time (Weiler, 1995: 11). The nation in possession of 'its own homeland and the exercise of political rights therein' (Mann, 2001: 209) is construed around the cultural heritage, but over and above the cultural descent, 'the nation' comes with certain values and norms that accompany its political and

territorial discourse. The state, on the other hand, is a legal concept which describes a definite territory and the aggregate of administrative institutions. The difference between the nation and the state is also reflected in the distinction between nation-building and state-building (Harris, 2009: 23). The focus of nation-building is the construction and promotion of a national narrative which is based on language, history, literature, and other cultural traditions that together form what we call national identity. The national symbols, such as hymns, flags, monuments, emblems, references to national heroes, the well-established phrases referring to history and all similar identity markers are part of the nation-building process. State-building, while complementary, is ideologically a different process: it aims at the establishment of a political community of citizens, a forging of social solidarity and respect and loyalty to state institutions. Historically, these two processes are mutually reinforcing, but their interdependence may have worked better in the past than it does in the present.

The distinction between the nation and state-building processes is even more important when it comes to the EU. The identity forging processes within the EU are facing not just a number of nation-states with corresponding national identities, but two mutually reinforcing and ongoing nation and state-building processes within each member state. The EU, in seeking to create a sense of political community, social solidarity and respect and loyalty to its institutions, should put emphasis on processes similar to state-building. The unity-forging process at the EU level can only emphasize the institutional belonging beyond and above the nation-state whilst acknowledging the existing cultural identities. Historically, politically and ideologically this is an unprecedented development and, not surprisingly, open to resistance from citizenry whose political, symbolic and cultural consciousness is still daily reinforced by the nation-state (Billig, 1995).

What is the political value of cultural homogeneity, the absence of which seems to put the EU at the immediate disadvantage in comparison with the nation-state? There is a long tradition in political thought which assumes that social cohesion and democracy form a mutually conducive dynamic. Otherwise, the well-known maxim by John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) that 'free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities' (Mill, 1991: 428) would make sense only if one assumes that 'nationality' stands for political like-mindedness. This assumption is flawed; the fundamental principle of democratic politics is political consensus and political equality, not homogeneous identities, and therefore cultural diversity can not be an obstacle to democracy. The only pre-condition of the democratic process should be the willingness to engage with the process itself which then can create conditions for cooperation and possibly forge political unity (Mason, 1999; Moore, 2001).

Behind this conflation of societal cohesion, political unity, cultural homogeneity, effective governance and democracy hide ideas of the 19th century nation-state. The corporate-like national symbolism produced by the traditional nation-state erected a whole set of political and cultural references whose meaning is so deeply entrenched in citizens' political consciousness that any questioning of their continued validity creates a near existential anxiety. National symbols are those identity objects, stories, personalities, songs, poems, emblems of political parties, artefacts and so on which are recognisable to everyone and usually found in souvenir shops.¹ For the moment it suffices to say that the nation-state has had a longer time to 'enhabit' (Cram, 2009b: 114) those symbols than the European Union and that while the national symbols are accepted as an evident extension of national narratives, the European symbols, in comparison, tend to appear hollow. This is not to say that European symbols do not – slowly – produce a similar sense of recognition and that national identities are not already affected by the EU and that we are not already witnessing the emergence of a more complex 'marble cake model' of European identity (Risse, 2005); it is rather to question the advisability of measuring the temperature of European identity against the national one.

European Union: An Ideological Project for Our Times?

Theories of nationalism do not agree on the origins of nations. To primordialists/ethno-symbolists, nations are a natural progression of ancient ethnic cores, propelled into history by modernity (Smith, 1986: 21-31; Malešević, 2004: 561-565). To modernists, on the other hand, nations are modern constructions whose origins can be found in the historical and political processes of modernity. Nations are either 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983) formed and politicized in response to the challenges of industrialisation (Gellner, 1994). They could be even 'invented' (Hobsbawm, 1990) as tools for elites to pursue their aspirations and resist the existing political order or legitimize a new order (Breuilly, 1993). The agreement among scholars of nationalism however is that nationalism was an answer to the changing social, political and techno-administrative conditions and challenges thereof which traditional societies faced. The question here must be whether the challenges faced by societies in our time can be found in that classical notion of 'the nation' and underpinned by the nation-state?

¹ This thought was inspired by Grayson Perry's sculpture of a war-like bronze skull titled 'Head of a fallen giant' (2007-2008) which seeks to express the changing face of the British national identity. The voodoo-like relic of the empire is encrusted with images of national symbols in the form of recognizable souvenirs sold to tourists, such as the Big Ben, the Three Lions, the Queen, the Tower Bridge, the London bus, the Paddington bear, the British bulldog, and so on. Yorkshire Sculpture Park, July 2009.

The obvious answer, after some 300 years of conflicts between national groups within and between states, suggests that the nation-state has failed to achieve peace among nations within its borders and between states. Peace is possibly the most important challenge, but there are many more challenges for the contemporary European nation-state. They concern its sovereignty, its institutions, its entire ethno-cultural design, the meaning of citizenship, democracy and consequently its identity, and not in the least – European integration. The EU with its open-ended political character, ever expanding geographic boundaries, lofty supranational aims and considerable political power has diminished the power of the nation-state, while, perhaps paradoxically, it is basing its political structure and mechanisms for exercising influence and implementing its objectives on the acquiescence of its national member states.

As the history, structures and mechanisms of the EU are not the subject of this paper, which focuses instead on the ideological foundations of the nation-state and its relation to the EU, I shall sum up the foundational goals behind European integration. These were: peace (in the words of the Shuman Declaration of 1950, ‘war to become not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible’), economic prosperity among its members as equal as is possible to achieve, the enhancement and extension of democracy across its ever expanding territory, and to transcend the nation and nationalism in favour of the implementation of universal human rights and cooperation among its peoples.

Joseph Weiler (1995) argues that Peace, Prosperity and Supranationalism were not only the founding principles of the original Community, but that they were the three principal strands of European idealism which the 20th century inherited (1995: 15). He further argues that there is a difference between ideals and ideology. Ideals, while rooted in morality, do not provide a programme for their realisation, they are a part of ideology which is a programme for ‘changing reality to achieve goals’ (1995: 3). Viewed from this perspective, European integration is an ideological project, the ethos of which is a non-national conception of politics among, within and beyond the nation-state. In the final analysis, the understanding and, indeed, the imagining of this non-national political community requires the abandonment of the notion that the political obligation, motivation and the rights of people should be delimited by national borders. It also requires the political participation and deliberation to transcend those borders. Herein lies the conundrum: while the politics and political competition remain dominated by national states, the rivalry for the political legitimacy between the nation-state and the EU is to be expected.

If the classical nation-state sought the answer to societal challenges of the 19th century and continues to do so in our time through its relationship to the nation, the EU is seeking to answer the challenges of our time by shifting the focus away from

the nation-state to the people – but not any particular people. The ensuing battle for identity and citizens' loyalty is actually a battle between the nation-state without answers to many concerns and expectations of its residents (for there is a very contemporary difference between citizens and residents) and the EU which may be able to provide many answers, but unlike the nation-state, can not count on their loyalty and commitment to unite behind its aims. In short, the EU remains unconvincing in forging a common political identity of an EU 'people'. 'The people' in the case of an 'EU people' (Bellamy, 2010: 15) should however not be confused with the ethno-national conception 'the people', a point which will be elaborated below.

Let us not labour under the false assumption that the nation-state which is a member of the EU is not challenged in its fundamental role as the sovereign entity and the guarantor of the democratic process. Any pretence by the EU to the contrary may be counterproductive to its efforts in seeking greater legitimacy. I begin with two of the most cherished triumphs of the nation-state: sovereignty and democracy. Sovereignty may be the weightiest concept to which the nation-state makes appeals and to which the population responds, but it is a concept and not an absolute value, and as with all concepts, sovereignty too is an historical product (Lord and Harris, 2004: 192; Keohane, 2002). As much as it assumes an absolute jurisdiction of the state over its territory, there has never been a time in history where the meaning and the concept of sovereignty has not had to adapt to normative and international developments. In our time, when human rights violations and security concerns readily send armies to intervene within the borders of sovereign states, when some states' territories are controlled by external powers (for example, Kosovo, partially Iraq and Afghanistan), and when political conditionality aiming at the democratisation of states has become a part of legitimate international politics, the concept of sovereignty has surely been demonstratively stretched beyond any assumption of inviolability. The sovereign state is a desirable notion, but it is only desirable when it provides security and prosperity within its borders and when it can do so without endangering neighbouring states. How many state leaders can answer the challenges of contemporary societies and international community without negotiating away some aspects of their sovereignty? The foundation of the EU is an evident case where the notion of sovereignty became subordinate to new norms deriving from the catastrophic excesses of sovereign nation-states during the Second World War.

Democracy is the fundamental principle of membership in the EU. There are many reasons why that should be so, but the most important is that in such a multi-layered, multifaceted and multinational polity all national groups have a legitimate interest in how others conduct their policies (Weiler, 2001: 53; Lord and Harris, 2004: 186-187). The EU with its high levels of legal and economic legitimacy has surpassed other international organisations in creating a regime (Weiler, 1995: 14)

in which the transformation of ideology into law constitutes a cornerstone of the integration – this includes democracy as one of its principles to safeguard the consensual governance and pursuit of the aforementioned goals. Logically, European integration implies a degree of constraint to state sovereignty through self-imposed agreements among member states.

Nevertheless, the EU has roots in a sovereign state and only a state recognised as such can relinquish some of its competencies to the EU, which does not make the EU more sovereign than its member states, because the EU does not exist without them. Krasner (1994) identifies four kinds of sovereignty and each kind can be negated, but also augmented, particularly within the EU. If *interdependence* sovereignty implies the state's ability to control its borders, the movement of goods, people, capital and ideas, then this kind of sovereignty is being increasingly eroded by globalisation and European integration. On the other hand, European integration enables the state to navigate interdependence in safer conditions and perhaps negotiate better results than it would otherwise. In terms of *domestic* sovereignty, the EU can't supersede the authority of the state to control the behaviour of its citizens, but it can and does stipulate democracy, and in the cases of new democracies, provides a buffer for its exercise. The third kind, the *legal* sovereignty, guarantees that states can not be coerced into agreements they do not wish to enter.

Lastly, the sovereignty with the most popular (and populist) appeal is the *Westphalian* sovereignty because it implies the supremacy of the state over any other external power, thus non-interference in its domestic affairs. As such it is tightly connected to national self-determination, nationalism and national identity. Interestingly enough, the evident alteration in the meaning of sovereignty of the first three kinds has led to the direct and indirect increase of the *Westphalian* sovereignty for many new member states, and that for the following reasons: First, the domestic struggles for national independence were often inspired by the fact that European integration was possible only to a sovereign state (for example, the successor states of the former Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and the Baltic states). Second, the cost and the insecurity connected to the lack of independent statehood experience were minimised by the integration into the larger political entity with enough safety nets to protect the fledgling state with its minimal economic power and shaky political foundations. Lastly, the status of otherwise unknown states was increased by membership in the club of well-established states, some of whom, paradoxically, are now seeking the support of these new member states in bolstering their own struggles with the EU (for example, the British Conservative Party in its indecision about the Lisbon Treaty relied on the Czech Republic's initial rejection of it).

By now it must be obvious to the reader that I am arguing that the nation-state with all its arsenal of triumphs – national identity, sovereign statehood and demo-

cracy – is finding itself in a transitional period from what we know to something yet unknown. The nation-state is finding itself in an *interregnum*,² in a period of discontinuity. The social order has changed, a nation-state's monopoly on power within and beyond its boundaries is eroding, its role in the relationship between the individual and the state has altered, and spaces for political contestation have escaped the national centre into different areas – some beyond the state into regional spaces, some across the borders to join the co-ethnics in another state, and yet others are bypassing the national level altogether and going straight to Brussels (Keating, 2004; Keating and McGarry, 2001). What will be at the end of this transition? All nation-states are changing, but the change for the EU member states is rapid and more dramatic. What form this new(ish) nation-state will assume can not be foretold, but the model we are looking at in the 21st century is already different to the one which entered the EU in the middle of the 20th century.

Wrong Questions about European Identity

There are some 500 million people from 27 nation-states who can call themselves officially a European citizen, a citizen who has at least two political identities – national and European. The meaning of citizenship and the concept of national identity need redeveloping in view of the evident fact that there is and will be a different nation-state with an increasing number of immigrants, many of whom will never become 'nationals' in the traditional sense because they do not wish to, and because the ties to their home countries are too strong. This is perhaps a concern for the traditional nation-state which has for too long elevated cultural identity to the status of political identity. The actual practice of politics relies on political participation, the compliance with rules and cooperation and commitment to state institutions – such a 'polity-based' identity (Mason, 1999: 272) is the identity that corresponds with the new nation-state and can be the basis for European identity too. In fact, national identity in the contemporary European state is partially already such an identity because it is at the national level where the political identity, often among different cultural groups, is forged and where a *modus vivendi* is found in order to create a sense of common endeavour and common future (Lord and Harris, 2004: 187-188).

The nation-state has a role to play in the European Union which goes beyond the protection of its national identity, its territory and its sovereignty. This role emphasizes the emancipatory character of the nation-state, which began as an ideological project of its time accompanied by ideals of civil liberties and equal rights for

² Bauman, Z. (2009) Europe and the Rest. Lecture presented with Balibar, E. University of Leeds; 13 May, Leeds.

all citizens. These norms have been too often sacrificed to the overwhelming power of nationalism. The reassertion of the nation-state against the power of the European Union does not suggest its strength, but a weakness bolstered up by nationalism. The 'new' nationalism which we see in the rise of extreme nationalist parties across the European Union member states, the anti-immigrant rhetoric, the rising anti-Islamism and anti-Semitism, and the narrow-mindedness disguised as respect for tradition, is not new – these are old answers to very new questions.

Having said all this, it is foolish not to acknowledge that common European identity, rooted in common existence, purpose and belonging to a common community, is failing to materialize (Checkel, 2005). Whether this is the main reason behind the much discussed democratic deficit (Majone, 1998; Schmitter, 2003; Crombez, 2003)³ is a different question altogether, but the partial answer may be sought in the continued belief that people's interests may be better served by national democracy than beyond it (Bellamy, 2010). The nation-state may be changing, but its ability to harness identities and provide the framework for politics readily acceptable to citizens remains stronger than that of the European Union. It does not mean that this ability will remain with the nation-state and that a European identity will not emerge (Cram, 2009b). Identities are not static (Cerutti, 2001: 4), they are formed and reformed according to circumstances and aspirations of nations and ethnic groups, and these are in flux now as they always were.

It is however to say that the process is slow and open to regression. Why? First, because asking whether there is a European identity emerging is a 'wrong question' (Cram, 2009a: 107). An appropriate answer can only be the re-hashing of old answers about incompatible histories of the European peoples, the strength of ethnic affiliations and the lack of common values for which one is willing 'to die' (Smith, 1995: 139), as if dying was the measure of the strength and value of identity. National identities are not a God-given fact. For all implied romanticism, national identities are a result of nation-building processes as their symbols are a result of conscious design and promotion. If the nation is a 'present-day consent, the desire to live together' (Renan, 1996: 52), thus indeed an 'imagined community', the consent and the imagining of this community have been forged by ordinary life and not by daily reminders of the heroic past, romantic victories and dramatic celebrations. The imagining of the European identity will probably follow the same route of 'day to day' reinforcement of political rather than national consciousness (Cram, 2009b: 113; Billig, 1995).

The nation-state in the early days of its emergence faced a similar challenge: to encourage and in some cases produce an identity which appeared natural, but was

³ For a comprehensive review of the literature on democratic deficit, see Jensen, T. (2009).

political at the same time. There is however a fundamental difference between how national identity was/is produced and how European identity is being encouraged, because the European efforts to construct an overarching identity above and over the nation-state are not fully within the power of the EU. Even if there is a reluctant European identity in formation, it is still reinterpreted and recreated at the national level, and therefore it is the national level where the emergence or stagnation of European identity is ultimately shaped.

The studies of nationalism teach us that the most successful rhetoric is the one that finds resonance with the people. It is likely that the resonance of the EU among the people is already greater than is generally assumed because institutions alter perceptions, behaviour and commitment, but at this stage when politics are still performed largely at the national level, it is not easy to test the intensity of this identity. The only way it could be tested is for a state to leave the EU and for citizens to be acutely aware of how much the EU meant and how their lives would be altered outside this framework. At this *'interregnum'* stage, European citizens are registering their discontent with national politics through elections to the European Parliament in the secure, but naïve, knowledge that this has a minimal impact on their life and possibly a benefit in passing the message to national politicians. Consequently, the low voter turn-outs for European elections and the choice of anti-European parties is not necessarily a measure of the lack of European identity. Equally, the struggles we witnessed during the Lisbon Treaty ratification are no reason to write off the possibility of the European *demos* in the absence of the public's identification with the EU. The nation-state does not collapse every time there is a constitutional crisis; the EU, similarly to the nation-state, has survived many crises and appears to have grown into a resilient political system.

This is a plausible foundation from which to make the following assertion: The whole debate about the lack of European identity is a repetition of the historical experience with the nation-state and its tendency to homogenize the population. At this stage in history there is no evidence that the EU has diminished national identities, even if it has altered the role of the state and the meaning of citizenship by exercising power over the former and extending the latter beyond the boundaries of states (Soysal, 1998). If anything, the EU has paradoxically invigorated ethnic identities. First, by curbing the power of the nation-state and insisting on the protection of minorities (Harris, 2009: 153-157); second, by providing an economic and security safety net for a number of sub-national groups seeking greater autonomy (for example, minorities in new post-communist member states, Scotland, Wales, the Catalan and the Basque regions in Spain and so on). Different political frameworks require different conceptions of identity, which suggests that there is no need for a European identity along the lines of national identity. The meaning of the European

identity has always been an experience of belonging to many nations, of pioneering ideologies and of shifting political boundaries and commonalities despite differences. The idea of the nation-state was born in Europe, so why arrest the birth of a different political framework which in itself is European in tradition and ideals and does not necessarily seek to abolish nations, even if it seeks to curb their ethnic emphases?

Conclusion

The EU is a political structure of incredible innovation and desirable membership, but the projection of this success appears weak and unconvincing. The goals of the EU respond to expectations of contemporary European societies which seek greater prosperity, security and freedom – the last political organisation of such success was the nation-state. The EU, as the organisation based on the membership of nation-states, but simultaneously trying to transcend them, is inevitably competing with the nation-state for people's loyalty and identity, which are thus far more compellingly attached to the nation-state. I have not argued about the character, durability or veracity of national identity, but about the consequences of the nation-state's ability to produce it and monopolize it. Hence, the efforts by the EU to recreate the same identity, but on a greater geographical scale (Cerutti, 2001: 1), while not futile, are necessarily slow, disappointing and probably counterproductive.

The EU can not be both: it can not offer the new future while pretending that the old nation-state with all its assumptions from a different era will stay intact. This is tantamount to placating the nationalism of nation-states. The nation-state has a role to play in people's lives; in some aspects of it, possibly an important role, but no longer a predominant role. It has failed in many ways, particularly in ways of peace and reconciliation among different cultural groups, and it has left many countries in dire political and economic conditions. The politics of nationalism allowed political tyranny and its principles have caused unspeakable brutality. I have argued that the nation-state evolved in response to historical and political challenges of its time and that its role in providing people with a sense of place in the world should not be underestimated and certainly not belittled. I have however also argued that the challenges faced by contemporary European societies – security, economy, ecology – can no longer be met by individual nation-states and that it is time to acknowledge the decline of the traditional nation-state and its monopoly on people's identity.

The cautiousness with which the EU competes with the nation-state for people's affection, identity and political loyalty is counterproductive. It appears to send confusing messages which suggest that the nation-state and the EU are equal projects with the same political objectives, though pursued on different levels, which will

lead to the desired form of European identity. That, eventually, people will add to their ethnicity and their national identity another, European layer, and that this over and above level will lead to the same political loyalty to the EU as it did with the nation-state.

The EU's objectives may serve the nation-state, but in terms of identity, they are not the same. The EU, unlike the nation-state, does not have a preferred nation, it is non-national at heart and trans-national in scope; the identity it seeks is political without the appeals to ethnic or national particularity, the emotiveness of which it seeks to curb. Given the war-torn history of the European peoples in the past, it is not a bad thing, but not a sufficient basis for the formation of a convincing European identity. One way, and possibly the only way out of the current 'battle' for identity is to acknowledge the real impact of the EU on the nation-state and open a debate by both European and national elites about which challenges of our time can be met by the EU and which are better kept at the national level. Citizens of Europe may then understand better how their national aspirations, individual concerns and political demands are mediated between different levels of governance within the EU (Olson, 1993) and adapt their identities accordingly – loyalty and passion for the EU may follow too.

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Erika Harris

NACIONALNA DRŽAVA I EUROPSKA UNIJA:
IZGUBLJENI U BORBI ZA IDENTITET

Sažetak

Ovaj članak, koji se temelji na proučavanjima nacionalizma, razmatra formiranje identiteta u Europskoj uniji uspoređujući je s nacionalnom državom. Njegovo je polazište da EU, unatoč svim svojim ekonomskim prednostima i političkoj inovaciji, ne uspijeva ljudima pružiti osjećaj pripadnosti ni steći političku lojalnost. Na osnovi ispitivanja koju funkciju identitet obavlja – za nacionalnu državu u prošlosti i za EU u sadašnjosti – ustvrđuje se kako je sposobnost EU-a da projicira značajan europski identitet ograničena, ali da postoje i granice sposobnosti nacionalne države da udovolji političkim izazovima suvremenih društava. Jedan od izlaza, možda i jedini, iz te “borbe za identitet” jest priznavanje zbiljskoga utjecaja EU-a na nacionalnu državu te otvaranje iskrene rasprave i europskih i nacionalnih elita o tome s kojim se izazovima našega vremena može uhvatiti u koštac EU, a koje je bolje zadržati na nacionalnoj razini. Bolje razumijevanje toga kako se nacionalne aspiracije, preokupacije i politički zahtjevi ljudi posreduju među različitim razinama upravljanja moglo bi dovesti do odgovarajuće prilagodbe njihovih identiteta – a za time bi mogli uslijediti i lojalnost i privrženost EU-u.

Ključne riječi: nacionalna država, nacionalizam, nacionalni identitet, Europska unija, europski identitet

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