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The Long-Term Implications
of EU Enlargement:
Culture and National Identity

Rapporteur
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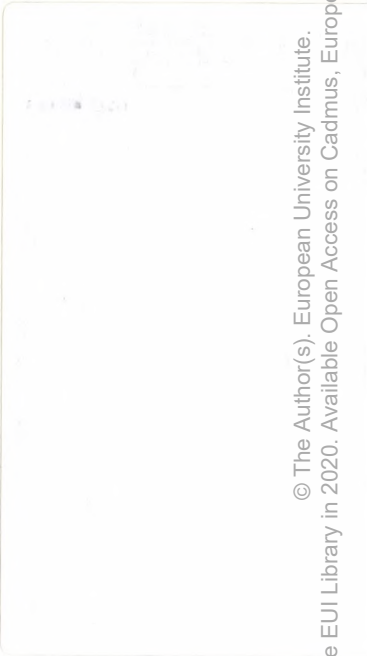
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Culture and National Identity**

**Report of the Reflection Group on the Long-Term
Implications of EU Enlargement: the Nature of the New Border**

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**Report of the Reflection Group on “Long-Term Implications of EU
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* This report reflects the discussion of the Reflection Group on the Long-Term Implications of EU Enlargement: the Nature of the New Border, set up jointly by the Robert Schuman Centre and the Forward Studies Unit of the European Commission. This report is based in part on two background papers written and presented by Elemér Hankiss and Hans-Dieter Klingemann on the 17-18 September 1998 in Florence. The report does not necessarily reflect all individual opinions of the Reflection Group members; nor does it correspond to the position of either the European Commission or the Robert Schuman Centre.

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Summary

Eastward enlargement of the EU raises questions of culture and national identity in two ways: firstly, is there a deep East-West divide in cultural values and the place of national identity in politics, which will make the absorption of new members from the East more difficult than has been the case with previous enlargements? And secondly, will greater cultural convergence be required to support deepening economic and political integration in the EU?

Despite very different historical trajectories, a clear dividing line between East and West in Europe cannot be drawn in cultural terms. There is significant diversity within each region, and significant overlaps between them. Cultures and national identities are constantly changing and adapting in response to pressures at both the global and local levels. Cultural uncertainties and anxieties in the face of change, and tensions between national identities and cultures and "Europeanisation" are apparent not only in new applicants to the EU, but also among existing member-states.

There is no evidence of a common European culture within the EU which could be used as a benchmark against which to measure the degree of convergence of applicants to some "European cultural norm". However, there are basic standards of democratic politics, human rights and the Rule of Law on which wide agreement could be achieved. The EU should devote more attention to defining more clearly and consistently its basic political standards, and to ensuring that existing member-states' performance in respect of these standards is monitored as closely as that of prospective new members.

Overcoming the "democratic deficit" revealed in the process of deepening European integration will not be achieved by efforts to foster a European cultural identity transcending other, national, local, sectional identities. Diversity will remain the hallmark of European politics. Respect for the principle of subsidiarity is more likely to win popular confidence and support for the EU than attempts to promote cultural convergence "from above".

The legitimacy of the EU in the eyes of its citizens will rest more on effectiveness in carrying out its mission than on identity. The accession of new members from the East will reaffirm the original mission of the EU as a framework for "overcoming the past" and promoting peace and security. The effectiveness of the EU and its policies in meeting the needs and expectations of its citizens in an era of rapid global change will play the decisive role in winning their allegiance in future.

Introduction

Questions of culture and national identity have come to the fore in contemporary European politics, and are now becoming a major factor in the dynamics of both widening and deepening integration in the European Union.

The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe dramatically demonstrated the deep-rooted aspiration of the peoples of this region for “national self-determination”. Their demands for democracy, personal freedom and economic prosperity were inseparable from the reassertion of national identity, and the claim to the right to govern themselves in a way which would express and defend their national cultural traditions. At the same time, these demands were combined with the aspiration to “return to Europe”. These newly-assertive national cultural identities sought recognition as part of a broader “European family”. This reflected the expectation on the part of the new democracies of Eastern Europe that they would rapidly be accepted as rightful, equal members of the “European club”.

Joining the European Union was thus from the start seen by the new East European applicants as not merely a matter of rational economic interest, but as the symbolic affirmation of national-cultural destiny. This psychological dimension has ensured that the latest wave of EU enlargement, and the associated technical questions of timing, preparation and phasing, will be much more complex to manage politically than previous enlargements. The questions of which states can or should be included, when and on what terms they will join, were never going to be settled by the normal negotiating procedures around the diplomatic conference table, but would be fraught with acute sensitivities which have major repercussions for the internal politics of the new democracies, for the often rivalrous relations between them, and thus also for the broader stability of Europe as a whole.

The relationship between the affirmation of national identity and the practice of democracy in the post-communist states of Eastern Europe has proved to be more problematic than at first recognised. What had been overlooked was the fact that democracy, in and of itself, does not provide a means of defining the political community to which the state refers and to which it is to be held accountable. National identities in post-communist Europe did not everywhere coincide with the territorial boundaries of states frozen at the end of World War II. While Western Europe since the war has seen the establishment of stable democracies within territorial borders that are no longer contested, and have become increasingly more open with the progress of economic and political integration, the sudden advent of democracy in the

Eastern half of the continent exposed much “unfinished business” on the agenda of national self-determination.

All three multinational communist federal states broke up when the communist monopoly of power collapsed, and a set of new nation-states were formed, most of which contained national and ethnic minorities which had not been consulted in the process, in some cases had actively opposed it, and everywhere felt less secure than before. Even in the existing nation-states such as Poland and Romania, conflicts about national identity, as well as the question of minority rights, have been prominent in the new political context.

* Since 1989, therefore, Eastern Europe has seemed to be reverting to a peculiar historical pattern in which national identity is defined and asserted in collectivistic cultural terms, challenging existing states where these contain more than one cultural nation, and displacing the political principle of equal individual civic rights on which the practice of democracy depends. And yet democracy is the primary political condition for membership in the EU.

The prospect of enlargement to the east thus raises the questions of whether East European national and cultural identities are qualitatively different in character from those found in Western Europe, and whether, therefore, the two parts of the continent can compatibly combine in the project of building an integrated European polity. These questions are addressed in section II below.

The question of national identity has also begun to force itself onto the EU agenda in an unprecedented way in a direct response to deepening integration. At its origin and in the earlier phases of its development, the then European Community was held to have no bearing on the national identities and cultures of its member-states. It was a community based on the shared political values of democracy, individual rights and liberties, and the Rule of Law. It was not, nor ever was expected to become, a state on the model of the nation-state, but rather was conceived in federalist terms, which left cultural matters firmly in the hands of its component member-states.

In tackling the new tasks of deeper integration set by the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties, in particular with the moves towards EMU and political union, the EU will inevitably impinge directly on areas of policy hitherto regarded as the preserve of the member-states, further eroding state “sovereignty”. The technocratic functionalist mode of integration has now reached the point where the federal question has to be faced. In many member-states, particularly within the governing elites of the original core group of founder-members, this possibility has always been accepted as part of the ultimate purpose of the Union. Functionalism was supposed to promote a new

common culture, if not at the level of daily life, at least at the level of business and government, and in this it has largely succeeded. There have been backlashes against excessive forms of harmonisation, but these have not hindered the project: to the extent that the federal question is now at the top of the agenda, it shows that some cultural convergence has already taken place.

However, the difficulties encountered in ratifying the Maastricht Treaty alerted elites throughout the Union to the danger that their societies may not view deepening integration with the same equanimity. Various forms of popular nationalistic backlash in the societies of the member states suggest that the major obstacles to deeper integration now include not only the technical complexities of the tasks, and the political complexities of elite-level inter-governmental bargaining, but also mass public resistance to a perceived threat of cultural homogenisation under the remote, bureaucratic and unaccountable rule of “Brussels”.

Basic questions of political legitimacy and popular consent now face the Union as it sets about deepening integration leading to the formation of a European polity. These questions inevitably touch upon culture and identity, and are treated in section III below. Will the abstract political values of liberal democracy, and rational calculation of economic self-interest, be enough in future to secure popular consent in the emerging European polity? Or must “Europe” begin to develop a substantive, “thick”, common cultural identity to underpin its institutions? Is a “European” cultural identity either possible or necessary? How much common ground does there have to be for the purposes of the deeper political union to be achieved? These are questions which the EU would have faced even without enlargement to the East; but enlargement, insofar as it increases the diversity of cultures and national identities within the Union, could well make it even more difficult to find satisfactory answers.

Is there an East-West Cultural Divide in Europe?

A long-term historical perspective points to deep continuities in the pattern of division in Europe which long pre-date the communist bifurcation of the continent. One frequently-cited historian, the Hungarian Jeno Szucs, has identified not two, but three distinct zones of cultural division in Europe - West, East and Central. Central Europe is an intermediate zone, exhibiting many of the traits of socio-economic backwardness, weak civil society, and the tendency for the state to develop an authoritarian character, which are evident further to the East. However, at certain times in its history, most obviously in the Renaissance and up to the early modern periods, Central Europe has been fully integrated into the mainstream of European culture, if not its vanguard. Even in the centuries of stagnation and oppression under imperial domination, proximity to the West brought Central Europe into close contact with the formative values of the Enlightenment and the challenges of socio-economic and political modernisation. Intellectual elites in these countries, in particular, identify more strongly with the liberal and democratic political and cultural values of the common European heritage than is the case in, for example, Russia.

The communist period saw the bifurcation of the continent, which overlay and for a time seemed to obliterate the distinction between the Central and the East European regions, as well as the national diversity within each region. The communist legacy is often argued to have moved Central Europe culturally further away from the West. This is hard to measure. In fact, general educational standards improved remarkably in the region as a result of communist policies of "catching up" with the West. This ought at least to mean the lowering of barriers to cultural convergence. Nevertheless, there remain significant lacunae in education and training in post-communist states which are painfully obvious in the shortages of appropriately qualified and experienced personnel for key positions in the economy, government administration and diplomacy. This is clearly a barrier to more rapid integration into the EU, but it does not necessarily signify a deep cultural gulf which cannot be overcome by a well-designed programme of training and know-how transfer.

Purely quantitative indicators as produced by opinion polling techniques can be very misleading in the interpretation of culture, if taken out of context. For example, secularism and individualism, which comparative survey data reveal in both Western and East European value-systems, could have completely different meanings in East and West, insofar as the processes which have produced these values are completely different. In contrast to the organic evolution of social values in the West, with its strong civil society independent of the state, in the East, secularisation had been enforced "from above" by the communist regime, accompanied by the destruction of independent institutions

and an ideological assault on popular mentalities. It could be argued that the result has been a kind of anomic "moral crisis" in societies where the intellectual tradition of the Enlightenment was already rather weakly embedded. Individualism in this context can take the form of pure egoism, a self-centred hedonism which signals a total loss of the value of altruism on which civil society depends. However, this problem may not be confined to post-communist Europe, as discussed below.

In assessing the cultural legacies of communism, it is important to remember that the communist regimes themselves differed from state to state, with varying effects on the evolution of national identities and cultures. In Poland and Hungary, for example, communism took on a distinctive, national-reformist character after 1956. Contacts with Western Europe were less severely impeded than elsewhere, and the regimes themselves were somewhat more open and responsive to the aspirations of their peoples. In Romania, on the other hand, the peculiarly oppressive Ceausescu dictatorship manipulated national identity and played on xenophobic tendencies in ways which continue to make themselves felt today both in domestic political discourse and in the state's relations with its neighbours and with the wider Europe.

Both long-term and more recent historical patterns could well contribute to the explanation of why some post-communist states and societies are evidently "doing better" than others when it comes to preparing themselves for EU membership. What seems to be most significant in this respect is the presence or absence of an underlying cultural consensus within the political elites, and between the elites and their societies, about the place of that nation in Europe. Where the "return to Europe" is widely accepted as a self-evident matter of national destiny, and appreciated as the means of protecting and promoting national cultural identity, then we find extraordinary readiness on the part of societies to endure the upheaval of economic transformation and align their political and legal systems to the requirements of joining the EU. This seems to be characteristic of development in Central European states like Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

On the other hand, in Romania, for example, while elites enthusiastically insist on the essentially "European" character of Romanian national culture, and therefore its right to be considered ready for membership of the EU, at the same time they can display reluctance and sometimes a resentful attitude towards pressure to accelerate economic transformation and adapt political institutions and practices (notably in the field of minority rights) to meet the demands of EU entry. It may well be that insistence on one's "Europeanness" in cultural terms is a substitute for practical action in the field of economic and political reform.

The new states formed out of collapsed communist federations also seem more insecure and sensitive about their national identities and their newly-won "sovereignty". While they may be as firmly wedded to the idea of their "European" identity and as committed to joining the EU as others, their vision of "Europe" may be one of fully "nationalised" (in the sense of ethnically homogenised) states, rather than of an open, transnational community of shared political values. They are thus more likely to encounter "Europe" as an alien cultural force, threatening national identity, when the EU insists on reforms which are seen as touching upon state sovereignty.

However, these considerations must be taken alongside an appraisal of the state of play in Western Europe. The questions which we pose about prospective new member-states of the enlarging Union can also be asked of existing member-states. The relationship between national identity and European identity is a live issue for nearly all member-states today, and we find important differences among them. For some, such as Germany and Italy, embracing "Europe" has been part and parcel of a process of redefining national identity in a secure, democratic framework; but deepening European political and economic integration could well threaten this national consensus in future. For other member-states, such as Great Britain, the relationship with Europe remains unresolved and surrounded by ambivalent feelings. Joining "Europe" has coincided with a long period of national decline, and has, for many, become associated with a sense of loss: of empire, of national prestige and self-confidence, of economic preeminence. British anxieties about the further loss of national sovereignty implied in the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties have been compounded more recently by the prospect of fragmentation of the state with the establishment of new Scottish and Welsh assemblies. Thus if European integration poses a challenge to national identities and cultures, then it is one faced to a greater or lesser extent by every European state, and not just the prospective new members from Central and Eastern Europe.

Moreover, the "moral crisis" which some would see in post-communist Europe may be not be unique to that region, but rather a more intense version of a malaise which is evident across Europe. For the collapse of communism also had a marked, and to some extent unexpected, impact on the place of national identity and culture in the politics of Western Europe. It hastened the decline of the "grand narratives" of ideology which had hitherto defined the basic political cleavage along a left-right axis. This has coincided with a seismic shift in the global economic context, leading to new perplexities about fundamental values, and about the feasible strategies and policies open to politicians. The old certainties of politics have thus dissolved in the West as well as in the East.

With the shackles of ideology removed, the politics of identity has once again broken through to the surface of West European politics. In many states, this has found expression in resurgent regionalist and minority nationalist movements. Moreover, the advent of globalised communications has contributed to weakening the capacity of states to cage and control cultural life within national frameworks. One result has been to accelerate the pluralisation and fragmentation of national cultures. But has this paved the way for the emergence of a common "European" culture and identity? To be sure, the use of English as a lingua franca is increasingly widespread; travel and the emergence of mass tourism bring greater familiarity and contribute to demystifying "alien" cultures; pop music, films and satellite TV now reach mass audiences irrespective of national borders. Whether this is leading or is likely to lead to substantive convergence in cultural values remains, however, a matter of doubt. On the one hand, these contacts may have a rather superficial effect, and in any case are likely to be assimilated into pre-existing cultural contexts. Thus whether the net effect of increased cross-cultural contact is to promote convergence, or to enhance awareness of difference, and even confirm prejudice, can hardly be generally predicted.

On the other hand, what evidence there is for a common culture transcending national frontiers points to its being global, rather than distinctively European, in content. Its sources are as much, if not more, extra-European than European, given the vital role of the US in cultural innovation, production and distribution. And this global culture is as easily available and readily consumed throughout the rest of the world as it is in Europe. It is difficult to see culture of this sort contributing to a coherent political identity which might underpin the process of constructing an integrated European polity.

Thus while there are good historical reasons to expect an East-West, or East-Central-West, cultural divide in contemporary Europe, it is by no means the only, nor necessarily the most problematic cultural challenge facing the new Europe. One could point to increasing divergence between globalised regions, fully exposed to and successfully integrated into a new international economy, and regions "left behind", unable to benefit from it. The division between core and periphery in Europe is one which cuts across state borders, and across the East-West divide: compare, for example, the dynamism of north-west Hungary, rapidly inserting itself into global networks, with the neighbouring Austrian province of Burgenland, where rural parochialism gives rise to demands for protectionism and resistance to opening up to the East. Our focus on the East-West division should not allow us to forget the salience of the long-standing North-South divide in Western Europe, which will not disappear with enlargement. Major non-territorial cultural divides can be identified along

generational lines, and along educational lines, greatly affecting the capacity of individuals to adapt and thus realise their life-chances in a unified European economic space. In confronting the problem of cultural diversity/cultural convergence in Europe, we need multi-dimensional "profiles" which can take into account the internal diversity within states, as well as the overlaps in cultural patterns across states and larger regional groupings. Such profiles would no doubt reveal a very mixed and changing picture of both cultural convergence in some fields and persisting, possibly deepening, divergence in others.

A further conclusion at this point would be the need for extreme caution in embarking on the exercise of defining the role of national identity and culture in the future political dynamics of enlargement. We find it increasingly hard to say what a "national" culture consists in, given the degree of openness to global influences, the fragmentation and pluralisation, and the dynamic fluidity that is characteristic of modern societies. How to measure the "fit" between such an elusive thing as a "national" identity and a "European" identity which is itself even more of a chimera?

Moreover, the new applicants can rightly point out that such questions were never before raised in connection with previous EU enlargements. Bringing "culture" onto the agenda as a particular problem in the case of the new Central and East European applicants looks like yet another symptom of West Europeans deploying their prejudices in order to justify delaying enlargement. We need therefore to ask why, and in what respects, "culture" is relevant to the assessment of the capacity of a prospective member-state to take on the formal acquis, and to match the performance of existing member-states in implementing it. We need also to consider whether the future deepening of European integration will require a greater degree of cultural consensus among member-states than has hitherto been necessary.

II The Implications for Enlargement

It could well be argued that “culture” is not a relevant factor at all in assessing prospective applicants for EU membership. Economic compatibility and geopolitical security are likely to be the overriding considerations, and both are much more amenable to rational analysis than culture. So is the formal constitutional framework of applicants. Member-states must be democracies, guaranteeing basic human rights and freedoms, established and maintained by the Rule of Law. General agreement on the basic conditions for the realisation of these political criteria can be reached, while recognising that they can operate satisfactorily in a wide variety of cultural contexts. Therefore the EU should confine itself to assessing applicant states' formal institutions and the efficiency of their functioning.

However, culture, in the narrower sense of political culture - values, attitudes, ingrained patterns of behaviour - does enter into the equation, insofar as the stability of democratic institutions, the real enjoyment of rights and freedoms, and the quality of the Rule of Law all presuppose an underlying web of more or less unspoken, taken-for-granted common understandings and assumptions. The practice of democracy may degenerate into demagoguery and authoritarian populism in the context of a society which defines the “nation” in collectivistic and homogenising ethnic terms, overriding the rights of individuals and minorities. The Rule of Law may be subverted by informal and corrupt networks of family, clan, party or business associates.

A proper qualitative assessment of the degree to which prospective applicants really meet the political conditions for EU membership will thus inevitably touch upon the cultural aspect. In order to avert the charge of arbitrariness and bias, increased efforts are needed on the part of the EU and its member-states to define a consistent and unambiguous set of common basic standards by which to measure the performance of political and legal institutions. This will have to be accompanied by greater willingness on the part of member-states to open up their own practices to scrutiny. If we are to demand that prospective new member-states live up to high standards in the functioning of their political and legal institutions, we cannot avoid turning the spotlight on shortcomings of performance among existing member-states. “Cultural specifics” may explain, but cannot be allowed to excuse any member-state falling below the agreed common standards.

An important consideration in planning for eastward enlargement is that cultures and formal institutional structures are intimately and inextricably linked, forming a dynamic, mutually reinforcing symbiosis. This linkage is not a one-way process: we cannot treat cultural values as fixed prior to and

independently of the institutional structures, nor can we safely posit a set of cultural "preconditions" for a "successful" democracy. To what extent cultural values actually determine the behaviour of political elites in specific crisis situations is far from clear. Moreover, values change and adapt over time, and can be significantly altered by a new institutional context which provides different incentives and rewards for behaviour, thus inducing value change. While it may well be the case that no democratic institutions can be expected to endure in the long term without a complementary and supportive underlying democratic political culture, if such institutions can be supported and held in place long enough (with possibly external support), democratic values have a good chance of developing and becoming embedded in everyday political life, as the case of post-war West Germany illustrates well.

The implications of this for EU enlargement are far-reaching. Being admitted into the EU as full members could provide the necessary external support for fragile new democratic institutions. The incentives offered by the prospect of economic prosperity and a stable security framework within the EU are already having a powerful impact on patterns of political behaviour as well as on specific measures of political and constitutional reform in all ten applicant countries. Two frequently-posed questions are whether the EU's decision to manage enlargement in stages is likely to weaken irretrievably the support for democracy in those states relegated to the "second wave"; and whether the early admission of new members, even before their democratic institutions are fully consolidated, will weaken the incentives to cultural adaptation, and lead to the incorporation of "difficult" new members who act as a further burden on the already complex processes of deepening integration.

On the first question, despite dire warnings of disillusion and despair among "second tier" applicants, there is by no means convincing evidence of a cultural rejection of democratic values or "European" identity. Voters in Slovakia and Latvia have recently demonstrated a readiness to change, in the first case their government, in the second their citizenship law, in ways which are likely to ease their path towards EU accession. The EU's standard-setting thus continues to have a positive impact which is welcomed by democratic and human rights activists within these countries themselves; but they also point out that the effectiveness of this could be enhanced by more consistency and clarity in the demands made by EU political conditionality. This confirms the need for more concerted attention on the part of the EU and its member-states to the definition of an explicit, coherent set of political standards applicable to all.

Nevertheless, enlargement in stages certainly complicates already difficult problems for many applicants of their mutual relations. In deciding to manage enlargement by stages, the EU has to accept its own responsibility to recognise the importance of the ties of culture and shared national identities

which link the “first wave” Central and East European applicants for membership with others: of Poland to Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania; of Hungary to Romania and Slovakia, for example. The terms and conditions of entry set by the EU should not be allowed to make managing these relations more difficult than before. This is particularly relevant in the field of border controls.

The question of whether the new member-states will prove “awkward partners” for the EU begs a prior question: what reasons are there to suppose on cultural grounds that they will be more “awkward” than many existing member-states? The future new members from Central and Eastern Europe may in fact bring with them a more intense commitment to the idea of a common European culture by virtue of their insecure position at the periphery, while those long-established at the “core” of Europe may enjoy the “luxury” of indifference or even resistance to the promotion of cultural convergence. The influx of new East European members could therefore give a fresh impetus to integration, rather than acting as an obstacle to it.

This argument is attractive. Even if the data on the extent of East-West cultural convergence is ambiguous, there are other grounds, in terms of their vital national security and economic interests, for supposing that the prospective new Eastern member-states will bring a special commitment to making integration work. Long and unfortunate historical experience of their “geopolitical predicament” between Russia and Germany has undoubtedly forged deep motivations to join and to help further develop the EU as the only viable alternative to the precarious position of a “buffer zone” of unstable and vulnerable small nation-states. This motivation is fully consistent with the original raison d'être of the European Community.

It is also likely, however, that the closer the applicants move toward full membership, the more we will encounter signs of resistance to aspects of “Europeanisation” - as Polish farmers and the Catholic Church have both on occasions demonstrated. The Polish government itself has recently been criticised for complacency and over-estimation of its bargaining power with the EU, leading to slow progress in the practical implementation of reforms. The widespread popular commitment to “joining Europe” revealed in public opinion surveys does not prevent 5 million Poles tuning in regularly to the quirkily xenophobic broadcasts of Radio Marija. Similar examples could be found elsewhere - including in existing EU member-states - to demonstrate that a general and abstract identification with “Europe” does not automatically signify cultural convergence.

This brings us on to the wider question of how much cultural convergence is needed for the purposes of deepening political and economic integration in the EU. It is already evident that the hugely ambitious project of monetary union has encountered as many cultural constraints as technical ones. National currencies may be argued on economic grounds to have outlived their usefulness, but they retain symbolic value, especially - but not only - in Germany. The future smooth functioning of the single currency seems unlikely to be secured without some central mechanism for financial transfers to compensate disadvantaged regions and states. How these resources are to be collected and distributed are questions not merely of economics but of political legitimacy and popular consent. It is these considerations which have prompted some to argue for the active promotion of a common European cultural identity. An integrated European polity, like any other state, it is argued, will need the underpinning of a "thick" consensus on values going beyond the "thin" one achieved so far on minimal shared political standards.

But the EU is not, and will not become a state on the nation-state model. There is little evidence that the European institutional framework has so far succeeded in moulding a coherent "European" cultural identity which could provide that instinctive feeling of political loyalty generated in the past by the sense of national identity. Opinion polls do show that a majority of people in Europe - including even the British - admit to feeling "European" at times and in certain circumstances; but this is always in addition to, and usually less intensely felt than, their national or regional identity. Multiple identities have to be taken as the reality of contemporary Europe. What is noteworthy, however, is that the sense of cultural "Europeanness" is not translated into enthusiasm for EU institutions. The EU has been notably ineffective in mobilising the level of common feeling that actually exists for its project of integration. The "democratic deficit" persists.

Some would see the solution in strengthening the powers of the European parliament, in the hope that a more active and assertive body would attract more interest, and ultimately more support, from the citizens of the Union. Others would argue for an intensified effort through policies in the fields of education and culture to persuade Europeans to link their identities with the EU. Both of these proposals rest on the assumption that "culture" can be deliberately reshaped "from above", by government policies and elite-led campaigns. But history provides us with much evidence of the imperviousness of "culture", as a slow-growing, complex product of human activity at all levels, to such influences. In any case, this approach smacks of "nation-state" thinking which is not appropriate for the emergent European polity, and is in any case beginning to appear out-of-date. It also embodies a "top-down" assumption that

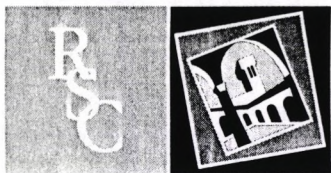
the problem is to make European citizens change their views, rather than to improve and reform the functioning of the institutions.

The emergent European polity will have to rest on shared commitment to rules and procedures perceived as fair and efficient, on the principle of toleration and institutional guarantees of respect for diversity. This might be seen as a weak, "thin" form of legitimacy, in contrast to the "thick" common cultural identity which has underpinned powerful nation-states; but this only poses insuperable problems if we envisage the EU as a kind of nation-state writ large. What sort of identity Europe needs can only be answered in the light of what tasks which we expect it to take on, and what powers we are prepared to transfer to its institutions to carry out those tasks. Current trends point towards the evolution of a complex multi-level polity, in which tasks are shared between the Union, the member-states, and sub-state levels on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity. National identities and cultural differences will continue to be a potent factor in politics at the EU level, and enlargement to the East will no doubt add new spice to the stew. The legitimacy of the EU, however, will be built on quite different terrain, which has more to do with effectiveness than identity.

Enlargement to the East will represent a reaffirmation of the EU's original raison d'être as a framework for peace and prosperity, overcoming the continent's uniquely destructive and self-defeating past. The importance of this for the new member-states may to some extent counteract the declining salience of the lessons of the past in the political imagination of West Europeans, as a younger generation without direct experience of the Second World War takes over. But the EU's legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of its citizens will depend even more on its performance in meeting their current and future needs. The EU has to prove its value as a framework for meeting the coming challenges of the global economy, which promotes the competitiveness of its producers while securing the welfare and well-being of its citizens. Elements of an emerging pan-European consensus can be discerned in the language of the "new social democracy", combining traditional aspirations for a "social Europe" centred on the values of social justice and social cohesion, with a pragmatic openness to the imperatives of responding to global competition.

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