

Representations of Europe as a Political Resource in the Early and Late Twentieth Century

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The history of representations of Europe has been examined from various angles and with widely differing aims over the past few decades. It has most commonly been written as a history of visions for European integration, usually to highlight the deep historical roots of today's European Union and point to the existence of visions of a common European policy throughout the history of Europe thus far, albeit with varying intensity and with varying aims. A second approach is related to the first yet with a different emphasis, namely the history of people's identification with Europe. It does not necessarily focus on a European decision-making centre, revolving instead around visions of a common Europe with a shared culture, places of remembrance, values and everyday norms that Europeans can relate to. These representations were not based on common political ideas of Europe alone but also on Europe as a way of life with shared norms and values, in the arts and common customs. Thus identification with Europe begs the question whether this was merely a history of elites or also a history of the European masses. Thus far the history of the identification with Europe has received less attention than the visions of a common European policy. Following the excavation of a vast contingent of historical representations of Europe by scholars employing either of these two approaches, a third approach adopted a more critical view to examine the numerous political and social differences and contrasts between representations of Europe that were successful and are still in effect today, and those that failed and are no longer acceptable. Scholars also began to grapple with the dark side of the history of representations of Europe, which is not part of the pre-history of today's European Union but instead serves as a historical overlay which the contemporary European Union decidedly sets itself off against. This includes, for example, the imperial notions of a natural, intrinsic European superior-

ity that developed since the enlightenment in the eighteenth century, or subsequently the seemingly scientific yet essentially baseless racist conceptions of Europe or National Socialism's ideological designs for Europe, which the National Socialists developed in the war against the USSR in particular and also as a means to accommodate the large non-German sections of the National Socialist armies.

This special issue examines representations of Europe with a fourth intention: the history of representations of Europe as a resource for political legitimization, which was not only employed within Europe by European politicians but also outside of Europe by non-Europeans. In these instances, Europe often served as a cipher for modernity, for global progress and for achievable superiority, however in general it was not employed as a means to establish a common decision-making centre, strengthen identification with Europe or criticize predominant representations of Europe, but instead co-opted as a source of legitimization for political alliances, military actions, political reforms or even national independence and ethnic autonomy within or outside of Europe. These representations of Europe were usually developed by political decision-makers or were created in close proximity to political decision making processes. They more rarely belonged to the programme of political opponents and intellectuals. They were usually conveyed via the media and were neither lofty armchair visions nor an everyday identification with Europe. They possessed a vast range of content and were oriented towards the context in which political decision-makers shaped policy, while their primary purpose was to secure the balance of power and mobilize resources for this end rather than serving to bring Europeans together. These representations of Europe cannot be comprehended adequately if one attempts to place them within the long debate concerning visions of a common European policy or within the history of identification with Europe, as they tend to appear marginal or even far-fetched in this context. They must be understood within the political contexts out of which they emerged and drew their meaning in the first place.

The term representations in this special issue is used in the sense, that representations of the own are invariably linked to the experience and the representation of the other. They are also seen as produced and shaped by specific actors and as being in continuous competition, conflicts and readaption with other representations rather than one single representation fully predominating a specific society. They are seen as emerging and changing only in a public sphere. Finally, representations are to influence social and political practice in legitimizing actions or in criticizing political decisions.

Representations of Europe in international relations are the central theme of this volume. It not only deals with the domestic political aims of these representations, but also with European international relations in two respects: the articles in this journal focus on the reciprocal relationships between Europe and other world regions, intermediate zones into other regions of the world, Russia and North Africa. Rather than concentrating on scholarly or intellectual visions alone, representations relating to political decisions and political events are at the centre of these investigations. This issue therefore deals, on the one hand, with representations by Europeans associated with European international relations: this includes military actions by Europeans governments, including the

concerted military effort against the Boxer Rebellion in China around 1900 (Christian Methfessel), or French and German political think tanks during the 1990s (Johan Wagner) or fundamental decisions by the European Union concerning Eastern Enlargement and Mediterranean policy in the 1990s (Andreas Weiß). On the other hand, this issue also deals with the closely related counter-side to European foreign relations, i.e. the representations of Europe in other world regions or at the fringes of Europe. The article on representations of Europe in Russia between 1905 and 1917 (Benjamin Beuerle) stands for this counter-side, without which the European representations of Europe would be difficult to grasp, as they developed either in an exchange or in confrontation with or in condescending disregard for these other representations of Europe.

The articles in this issue deal with two periods of uncertainty in the development of representations of Europe. They examine, for one, the beginning of the twentieth century, a time in which Europe was indeed at the peak of its global power, yet in the representations of Europeans it was commonly perceived to be in the midst of deep uncertainty. In these perceptions, Europe was no longer the undisputed superior civilization over all other world regions, the navel of global progress and the superior model example for others to follow. Europe was facing new competition by the economic and political modernity of the rapidly ascending United States whose economy and population overtook the large European countries, and by the surprising modernity of the Japanese military machine, which defeated Russia in 1905. Some European authors warned of a new predominance of the American economy or the “Yellow Peril” from East Asia. This was among the reasons for the sense of crisis in Europe, for its own critique regarding the modernity of European values and the benefits of scientific progress, for the fear of Europe’s decline, for fears about the European arms race and a new war, and also for the nostalgic orientation towards non-commercialized, non-modern, non-European cultures in Asia and Africa. This is also the context of the articles on European military actions against the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900/01 and on representations of Europe in Russia before 1914. In Russia’s case, however, the uncertainty was an inward one, whereas Western Europe’s own uncertainties had not yet affected the Russian debates.

In the 1990s, the second period under examination in this issue, Europe faced yet another upheaval and renewed deep uncertainty. Europe had to adapt to three new situations. The collapse of the Soviet Empire spelled the end of the Cold War. Europe not only had to build a new relationship with the only remaining superpower – the USA – but also faced new responsibilities in its immediate vicinity in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and in the Mediterranean region. The Eastern part of Europe experienced a fundamental political and social upheaval and the challenging transition from a centrally planned Communist economy to a mixture between a free market economy and state intervention. How Europe would position itself towards new superpowers – to China, India and Russia – also remained an open question. Secondly, Europe not only had to adapt to the accelerated pace of globalization in the 1990s, but was also among the important, often underestimated key players in this process of globalization. Lastly, a new situation also arose for Europe because the European Union not only gained additional competence

and power, but had already been enlarged to include the neutral states in the 1990s and intended to admit new members in the Eastern part of Europe beyond this. The 1990s were also a period defined by new deep European disappointments, the most spectacular being the disappointment over the European Union's inability to effectively intervene in the Yugoslav Civil War and cease hostilities. Beyond this, there were numerous other disappointments, as the expectations heaved on the European Union in many political areas, including foreign policy, had grown enormously and exceeded the actual means and capabilities of the European Union by far. In this situation of upheaval, the representations of Europe developed in the media and in proximity to political decision-makers were also subject to change. What ultimately defined Europe, how its relations to other world regions should look like, where the borders of Europe lay and how Europe set itself apart, which areas outside the European Union were particularly important for Europe – all this was fiercely debated in the 1990s, and sometimes also decided.

Taken together, the contributions in this volume reveal just how profoundly representations of Europe as a political source of legitimization changed between the beginning and the end of the twentieth century. Four essential changes can be traced in summary. First, in its self-conception and in the perceptions abroad, Europe was the global benchmark for modernity at the beginning of the century, despite all European self-doubts in the face of the new economic modernity of the United States and the new military modernity of Japan. By the end of the twentieth century, however, Europe had lost this global position. In European representations of Europe, the United States in particular had become the primary new benchmark of modernity. Europeans nevertheless considered their own continent to be more liveable in a number of important aspects, especially when it came to the use of force in the private and the public sphere, environmental policy, public social security, city planning, secularization and a foreign policy geared towards negotiations rather than military action. Europe had been eclipsed by the United States as the benchmark of modernity, indeed also as the predominant military or economic threat. In the perceptions from other world regions, however, Europe was not merely viewed as a crisis zone, but also as a positive alternative to the American model, particularly with regard to social welfare and the international integration of nation states. Thus representations of Europe forfeited their original efficacy as a source of legitimization, yet retained considerable importance as a contrasting image to the modern United States of America.

Second, the contents of representations of Europe with which Europe set itself apart from other world regions and which were considered European in other world regions became narrower over the course of the twentieth century. At the beginning of the century, Europeans considered Europe to be superior in almost all areas. The rule of law, the degree of civilization, the sciences, the rationality in economics and the state bureaucracy, technological progress and the standard of living, and sometimes religion too, were seen as key elements of superior European culture. Even from an outside perspective from Russia, the (Western) European model was a sort of all-purpose weapon in a number of different political areas, including agricultural policy, social policy and military policy

around 1900. By the end of the twentieth century, however, the political contents of representations of Europe had become considerably narrower. European representations of Europe now centred on democracy and human rights in particular, but also on securing peace in Europe and its neighbouring regions, prosperity through economic growth and social security. Indeed, the scope of contents in which Europe differed from other regions of the world had become even narrower from a European perspective. Neither democracy and human rights nor economic dynamism were viewed as distinctly European features. Moreover, Europe continued to expect other world regions to adopt European values, although barely anyone in Europe at the end of the twentieth century still gave consideration to the methods that had been employed to enforce European values – through military action, through colonization or missionary work – at the beginning of the century. In other regions of the world, the contents of representations of Europe became even narrower. Europe stood, above all, for social security and for international political integration, sometimes even still for prosperity and consumption, but no longer for more.

Third, the geographical space of the representations of Europe also shifted. It is by no means marginal if representations of Europe that drew comparisons to China gained currency around 1900, as East Asia featured prominently in the European imagination. In world-historical terms, East Asia had been the most important counterpart to Europe for many centuries. On the other hand, the fact that the two articles dealing with the 1990s focus on Europe's neighbouring regions, i.e. Northern Africa and Eastern/South-Eastern Europe, is characteristic of this period. The world regions of particular interest to Europe narrowed down to the immediate neighbouring regions and the Atlantic over the course of the twentieth century.

Fourth, the meaning attached to representations of Europe in the realm of foreign relations grew to a considerable degree. Despite their rivalries between empires and nation states, Europeans undoubtedly shared a common European self-conception that distinguished them from the colonized peoples in Africa and Asia. This self-image was evoked time and again, for example in the famous concept of the "white man's burden". Representations of Europe played a more important role in European foreign affairs before 1914 than is often assumed. As Christian Methfessel's article shows, they were employed and transmitted via the media, not only on occasion of rare concerted military actions as against the Boxer Rebellion in China, but also for national imperial projects. During the 1990s however, representations of Europe greatly gained in importance in the European Union's foreign relations, since the Union had already attempted to develop its own foreign policy towards other world regions since the 1970s with aims and methods that would also distinguish it from the foreign policy of individual European national governments. Representations of Europe thus became ever more significant as a resource for legitimization in European foreign affairs at the end of the twentieth century. Discussing these representations in a public forum, criticizing them or refining them came to mean more in political terms. Conversely, representations of Europe were no longer

being employed as a legitimizing resource in the domestic affairs of non-European states as frequently as at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The articles collected in this volume come from the sub-project A5 of the Collaborative Research Project (Sonderforschungsbereich) 640 “Representations of Changing Social Orders”. Benjamin Beuerle has investigated representations of Europe in Russian political debates at the beginning of the twentieth century. His research indicates that Western Europe served as the benchmark for modernity across almost the entire political party spectrum – except for the extreme right and the Tsarist court – whereas it was employed as a legitimizing resource for a whole range of different political projects. Western Europe stood for modernity, particularly when it came to two of the most important political issues at the time: agrarian land reform, where Denmark featured as a particularly prominent model, and the introduction of social insurance, where Germany served as a commonly cited frame of reference. Unlike Western Europe at the time, this modernity had not yet been cast into doubt here. Furthermore, in contrast to the Ottoman Empire, the positive representations of a highly modern Europe were not hampered by fears of a military threat by Europe or European economic predominance. However, the notion of one’s own backwardness as compared to Western Europe did not extend into the realm of foreign policy. In the Russian debates, Russia itself was considered a full-fledged member in the European concert of powers.

Christian Methfessel’s article examines representations of Europe in the British and German media’s coverage of European colonial wars and military actions between the mid-1890s and 1909. These representations commonly revolved around the notion of protecting Europeans under threat, the spreading of European civilization and strengthening the European economy, and in some cases also the spreading of Christianity. Representations of Europe as a model example played an important role when it came to the legitimization of the military actions, albeit almost only prior to 1900. As it became increasingly difficult to mobilize broad support for these military actions among the British and German public and legitimize them following the turn of the century, representations of Europe as a model came to lose their previous significance. According to Christian Methfessel, the reasons behind this marked decline can be traced back to increasing difficulties and setbacks regarding military policy in the outer-European world and changing perceptions of imperial expansion and colonial policy in both countries. At the same time, the conception of European space also changed. During the Boxer War and the military operation against Tibet (1903/4) Russia was occasionally portrayed as an Asiatic power and excluded from Europe in the British media, whereas during British-Russian co-operation in Persia in 1909 the “Times” would emphasize the Europeanness of Russia.

Andreas Weiß deals with representations of Europe in the context of the European Union’s foreign relations with East-Central and Eastern Europe and with Northern Africa during the 1990s. He picks up on two of the European Union’s central policies in his article: the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership of 1995 and Eastern Enlargement, which was implemented in 2004 but was already being discussed intensively in the 1990s.

Andreas Weiß argues that the European Union's self-conception of an open, democratic Europe which championed human rights increasingly saw itself confronted with accusations that Europe was building a new empire or was sealing itself off from the outside like a fortress. While he considers neither of these accusations to be accurate, he nevertheless views them as indicators for the absence of a clear, concise foreign policy of the European Union during the 1990s.

Johan Wagner examines representations of Europe by the most important French and German political think tanks during the 1990s through their political consultation and public relations work. He highlights the considerable French-German differences, which nonetheless began to diminish to some degree due to the growth of international networks linking these institutions and the increasing attention they paid to European issues. Political consultants focused on the European Union in particular, often with a critical distance towards the Union's policies. In this particular case, representations of the European Union sometimes conceived of it as an empire of some kind, but most often saw it as a model for neighbouring regions such as the Maghreb, while the lines separating EU-Europe and its neighbouring regions tended to become sharper.

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