

# The Building of European Identity

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**Abstract** The paper will investigate if the building of a European identity is already underway, noting that identity-building processes rest on a common set of processes, issuing in: symbol systems; collective rituals, ceremonies, public holidays, etc.; behavioural codes of conduct and values inspired by mythical societies of forefathers (as inspired by historical accounts), providing a template for a future society. European Union is merely an expanded economic bloc built on entrenched autonomies, or is a new collective identity emerging? With reference to common symbols, Europe boasts all the apparel of identity, namely it has a flag, anthem, motto and currency. At the same time there are signs indicating a strengthening of the common identity. As of 1985 Europe has also celebrated the May 9 anniversary, and other types of European events are starting to take hold from the bottom up. White Night art festivals, or Museum Nights for example. The latter events seek to establish a common identity by leveraging Europe's culture and heritage, its monuments and museums, and by seeking to inform the broader public of Europe's track record in the areas of arts, humanities and science. As previously noted, national identities draw on a historical past, on former models for society and on behavioural models underlying the latter. A research into leading European personalities both historical and contemporary, carried out in some European countries offers similar answers and image of ideal European society.

**Keywords** Identity, Europe, Symbols, Rituals, Myth

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## 1. Representations and Symbolisms within Collective and National Identities

The term identity is derived from the late Latin *identitas*, which in turn is derived from the term *idem*, meaning *selfsame*. As applied to philosophy, *identity* underscores consistency and uniqueness. In the legal context, it is used to designate individuals; identification papers or identity cards, for example. In sociological terms, *identity* specifies a

person's uniqueness as both defined by an individual's combined instincts and rationality, and by the roles and expectations that community specifics breed in the individual - hence drawing a distinction between *individual identity* and *social identity*.

The concept of identity, per se, is a relatively recent one; one that strictly relates to the advent of modernisation. Ancient philosophers thought of man as a univocal being, albeit comprising body and soul. As opposed to *I*, *identity* requires a representation of the self: for an individual to be oneself and not *I* questions the individual's uniqueness, establishing a divide between the being and perceptions thereof; between existence and appearance. Man is thus viewed as *other than the self*, in ways akin to *alienation*. According to Marx [1], in the capitalist world "man is estranged from man. When man faces himself, he faces the other."

Freud offered an equally radical critique of the concept of uniqueness, positing the existence of a tripartite *Id*, *Ego* and *Superego*, marking a shift away from univocal representations of being to a more complex structure - in which the *Id* inwardly interacts with the subconscious and outwardly interacts with others (their behaviour and emotions), constantly building the self (Freud, 1971). No one, according to Freud, can think of themselves - or be thought of - in fixed terms, since diverse instances and relationships elicit specific aspects of identity at the expense of others. In other words, an individual possesses what could be defined as an *open identity*; one whose multiple facets reflect the degree of complexity of the surrounding universe.

A hallmark of the modern age is the increasing diversification of social relationships, which has issued in a proliferation of symbolic forms of intercourse based on generalisations and "labels" that allow for condensed, direct definitions of traits, roles and behaviours that in day to day life people will perceive and use to treat people based on typification structures. "That leads to the assessment of others as man, European, a buyer, a jovial type and so on." (On these arguments see Berger and Luckmann [3]). Such typecasting clearly affect interpersonal relationships, in that direct relations will be modelled according to the chosen behavioural stereotypes; that will hold true until their validity is disproved by behaviours not matching those

expected. The latter circumstances lead to changes in typecast as well in subsequent behaviours and expectations with respect to the typecast individual.

Intercourse between persons with differing social backgrounds also tend to be regulated by way of generalisations on background, which necessarily involve attributing behavioural traits based on social stereotypes going beyond individuals' specific characteristics. In Italy, for example, the mutually reciprocal typification of city dwellers and country farmers was established through centuries of typecasting, which have essentially sought to ascribe a civilised manner (i.e. refinement and elegance) to the former and crudeness and simplicity to the latter. The Italian language's definition of a peasant as either *villano*, *pacchiano*, *cafone* or *burino* owes its etymology to rural dialects; their usage is wholly disparaging and whilst initially used with reference to country dwellers, they are currently used to address residents of a city's outskirts.

Interaction through stereotypes can be seen to occur beyond the bounds of local community, district or city relations, also characterising international relations, extending to relations between different peoples and whole states. There is a tendency for each to refer to the other via a system of broad generalisations, each indicating a set of characteristics and expectations which effectively determine mutual behaviours. This phenomenon gives rise to a mutually reciprocal process whereby a counterpart's presumed identity and behaviour is met with by a party's own presumed identity, establishing a role play which underscores the outcome of interaction.

Owing to our anthropocentric approach to knowledge and to choices of identity – at both individual and collective levels – based on our differentiation from others, strangers or foreigners are typically defined by our understanding of how they differ rather than by how we may liken them to ourselves. Hence, a foreigner's cultural habits are not just perceived as different, but as strange, or dangerous or primitive. Romans described all people living outside the empire as barbarians; a definition which was to take on disparaging connotations.

Generally speaking, disparaging stereotypes are directed at the people geographically closest to, rather than farthest from us. The people of Lombardy, for example, are likelier to conjure up ugly definitions of the Swiss and of Sicilians rather than of Hawaiians. The latter are more likely to be stereotyped as exotic, to the extent that they may actually be deemed to be so far removed and different as to evoke the imagining of an ideal society.

Such types of interrelation mechanisms are increasingly common within industrialised societies, acting within them - due to increased levels of social intercourse - and outside them - due to globalisation, trade, migration, cultural developments and the Internet. Stereotyping has even more far-reaching consequences in global finance, which is dominated by expectations at the expense of fundamentals.

Italy's stereotyping as unreliable - which has weighed

heavily on Rome's international relations and on the country's overall reputation - takes on even more detrimental connotations in light of the country's dependence on global finance.

Stereotyping is among the factors that have contributed to ramping up the spread between Italian and German treasury bonds and to downgrading by international agencies - despite solid fundamentals, conspicuous private savings and worsening prospects elsewhere - of Italy's sovereign debt rating.

Applied to finance and economics, the imaginary - as a driver of stereotypes and collective identities - plays a significant role, especially when it short-circuits objective assessments.

How creditors and money movers construe reputation impinges on a financial entity's access to credit. The more reliable a debtor appears to be, the more favourable the credit terms granted and the extent of investments.

## 2. Representations of Identity

In keeping with the previous assessments, one can say that collective identity is established in much the same way as individual identities are. The above also holds true when it comes to affirming identity through conflict - generally speaking, involving those closest to us and who stood as previous models for us. As with individuals' coming of age - when adulthood is attained by challenging and overcoming parental figureheads - new communities establish themselves by critically appraising and shunning any such entities whose rule or power they wish to escape. The latter phenomena lie at the heart of revolutions - as in the American settler uprisings against the British motherland - and wars - as in the former Yugoslavia - and are prerequisite to establishing new independent states, to breaking with the past and to asserting diversity.

Such phenomena inevitably entail challenging others, their values and customs; the same applies to the independence movements of Cataluña and Lombardy, which have foregone violence and settled for varying degrees of self-government. Italy's Lega Nord Padania (LNP) and its activists have sought to underscore their Lombard identity by attacking Rome and its corruption, the Italian state as a whole, the national flag and even the national anthem - forcing the Office of the President of the Republic to constantly take remedial action. In so doing, the LNP party also resorted to heroes such as Alberto da Giussano, the 'Carroccio' war wagon; symbols of the Lombard League's battles against the Empire... such systematic opposition sought to establish behavioural models based on myth and tradition, and to provide inspiration for a new collective identity.

The end result, according to Hobsbawm, is "a curious, but understandable, paradox: modern nations and all their impedimenta generally claim to be the opposite of novel,

namely rooted in the remotest antiquity, and the opposite of constructed, namely human communities so 'natural' as to require no definition other than self-assertion. Whatever the historic or other continuities embedded in the modern concept of 'France' and 'the French' - and which nobody would seek to deny - these very concepts themselves must include a constructed or 'invented' component. And just because so much of what subjectively makes up the modern 'nation' consists of such constructs and is associated with appropriate and, in general, fairly recent symbols or suitably tailored discourse (such as 'national history'), the national phenomenon cannot be adequately investigated without careful attention to the 'invention of tradition'." (see in the text of Hobsbawm and Ranger [2])

The latter phenomena do not generally coincide with the birth of a new political nation, which tends to mark a break with the past - the French Revolution, for instance, led to the scrapping of the old calendar to assert the dawn of a new era. More often, they tend to take place subsequently, once social stabilisation needs arise. In fact, while symbols such as the tricolour flag and the Marseillaise were established during the Revolution, it is only after 1870, during the Third Republic, that the symbols of the French nation flourished.

Public ceremonies were key to inventing tradition, and foremost among them was Bastille Day, established in 1880. The latent function of national anniversaries, jubilees and public holidays is and was to establish collective rituals that substantiate the civil religion on which social solidarity is built.

Steeped in ritual, secular national religiosity requires symbols and places of worship. The allegorical figure Marianne was only conjured into being during the latter years of the Second Empire; countless monuments and statues of her flourished throughout France. As a symbol of the French Republic, Marianne also featured on the franc - similar figures featured on the currencies of other nation states at the time of their establishment. Hymans describes the latter as *state iconography* - namely depictions eliciting direct identification with the state and its symbols -, and may include a monarch or ruler's effigy - as in the case of Elizabeth II on contemporary English coins and banknotes or of George Washington on the one dollar bill. State iconography can also feature mythical figures such as the goddess Athena, or the allegorical figure Marianne; in both instances, the indeterminacy of such symbols allow them to encompass the communities they stand for. In Italy, for example, the fascist years witnessed the revival of the *Roma elmata*, a helmet-clad woman donning classical robes, depicted on banknotes - the latter figure is very similar to yet another female allegory of the Italian nation, the so-called *Turrita* or Woman of Syracuse, a revised rendition of a relief figure found on a 4th century coin in Syracuse.

The radical overhaul witnessed by the nations of the West during the 19th century - via the affirmation of national identities - and in the 20th century - through the masses' claiming a stake in government state via the establishment of political parties and unions - affected all layers of society and

government. Such changes had an immediate impact on the imagery chosen for coins and banknotes. Sovereigns, divinities and other national symbols were replaced by symbols of labour, industry and trade, by workers and farmers and even by portrayals of daily life, featuring men, women and children alike.

With public sentiment favouring new forms of liberalism built around a newfound individualism, the West's states, political organisations and unions witnessed a decline in appeal and, hence, power during the last decades of the 20th century. The latter shift was, yet again, reflected by the appearance of outstanding personalities on banknotes and coins. Among them composers Verdi and Strauss in Italy and Austria, writers such as Swift in Ireland, scientists such as Newton in the UK. The state, as such, ceased to be the vessel for national identity, replaced by more durable - Italy providing proof to that effect - yet more tenuous cultural icons. Hymans highlights the fact that representations of the state have become increasingly rare on European banknotes; featured on 77% of banknotes at the turn of the 20th century, their presence dwindled to 2% at the turn of the 21st century. Over the same timeframe, depictions of art and science greats rose from 6% to 53% (Hymans, 2004).

### 3. Representations of Identity and the Euro

At the time of the common currency's launch, European institutions were well aware of the symbolic importance attached to the choice of images on euro coins and banknotes. As submitted by Vissol, from logo to image, every coin and banknote detail was subject to lengthy and somewhat laborious European Council discussion. As the EU's highest ranking body, the European Commission ensured that Council deliberations sidelined national traits, underscoring any aspects consistent with a single European identity. The Commission explained the choice of the "€" logo as inspired by the Greek letter epsilon "in reference to the cradle of European civilisation and the first letter of the word Europe."<sup>1</sup>

In order to secure a balance between unifying representations of Europe and diverse national identities, it was agreed that coins should feature the map of Europe on one side, and freely chosen images specific to each country on the other. The common reverse side, however, varies:

1, 2 and 5 euro cent coins feature a globe with Europe featuring prominently in the foreground, emphasising Europe's openness to the rest of the world rather than its monetary entrenchment;

10, 20 and 50 cent coins feature a map of Europe with clear demarcation lines along national borders, conveying

<sup>1</sup> European Commission, 23 July 1997 tratto da Thierry Vissol, The Euro: Outcome and Element of the European Identity, Yale Center for International and Area Studies, [www.yale.edu/opa/arcybc/v31.n12/calendar.html](http://www.yale.edu/opa/arcybc/v31.n12/calendar.html)

Europe as an ensemble of states;

1 and 2 euro coins feature a borderless continent, portraying Europe as a hypothetical single future entity.

The obverse side's design was left for member governments to decide. A majority of Eurozone members opted for state iconography:

- *monarchs* in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands;
- *national symbols* in Ireland (Celtic harp), Portugal (royal seals), France (Marianne), Germany (oak twig), etc.

Greece and Italy made an altogether different choice, with the former opting for patriots and the latter choosing cultural icons.

Banknotes were subject to an altogether different treatment, with their stylised images carrying no specific reference to any one nation. Advised by experts comprising European Central Bank artists and draftsmen, the Council and the Commission agreed to do away with historical figures or real life locations and instead to resort to symbols of European culture as embodied by the continent's architecture. The styles chosen ranged from Romanic to Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo and contemporary. The five to five hundred euro banknotes each feature one of the latter styles, with doors and windows on one side and bridges on the other, thus symbolising both a world outlook and a connection among European nations. In many ways, the latter choice has sought to convey a new vision, not just for the currency but for the European Union itself. A vision in which the Union is neither a new state in its own right nor the sum total of European states (whose single identities and symbols is entirely sidelined, except for their broader, shared cultural heritage).

The above vision ranks among the European construct's inherent contradictions, whose extent and complexity have been made all the more apparent by recent euro stability issues.

During the early fifties, when the prospect of a union of states was anything but the foremost concern, European nations understood that establishing a common trade area would kindle economic development and create mutual safety nets, averting the prospect of repeat wars. With the Second World War just behind them, the Common Market's constituent members - France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg - were almost entirely dependent on the United States for financing and resources. America dominated Europe both on a military footing - with bases, troops and its NATO leadership - and on a financial and economic footing - via the Bank for International Settlements (which during the 50s managed the European Payment Union funds), via the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Holding 90% of the world's post-war gold reserves and with the dollar traded on par with gold, world finance was

dominated by the United States. According to Vissol, though begrudging their predicament, Europeans gratefully adapted to American supremacy and politics. In that respect, in the early days of the Common Market, Europe's first moves towards monetary emancipation were more the consequence of poor American monetary policy than a quest for monetary autonomy. In fact, European governments only acted on the need for economic and financial policy coordination (via the Committee of Governors of Central Banks) during the dollar's 1961 convertibility crisis and the subsequent establishment of the London Gold Pool (which European central banks joined alongside the UK).

The end of the London Gold Pool and Nixon's unilateral declaration of the dollar's non-convertibility to gold in 1971, pushed Common Market governments to set up the so-called European Snake to minimise currency fluctuations. Following America's decision to float the dollar, the war in Vietnam and recurrent oil crises, in 1979 European governments - led by German chancellor Helmut Schmidt and French president Giscard d'Estaing - agreed to the establishment of the European Monetary Union (EMU) and the European Currency Union (ECU) - setting the premises for a future common currency.

The system was built around the German mark and the stability and anti-inflation policies governing it. Though Germany's domestic interest rate policies were geared to a narrow rates corridor, spreads gradually increased during the late 80s, destabilising exchange rates.

September 1992's speculative attacks bred an EMU crisis, which led to the UK and Italy abandoning the union. Attacks on the French franc the following year led to the so-called Brussels Compromise, in August, which set the rates corridor at 15%.

Neither EMU members' departure nor subsequent corrective manoeuvres bred the kind of monetary stability which Common Market members sought. First discussed two decades earlier, the adoption of a common currency became European governments' top priority. Far from being just a requirement dictated by circumstance - or the lesser of two evils, as portrayed by sectors of the German and Scandinavian financial communities - the common currency was perceived by a sizeable proportion of European public opinion as a valuable goal accompanying the European unification process. In Italy and in several other countries - especially in southern and Eastern Europe - euro membership was viewed as a success, testifying to economic progress and growth; as granting a status on par with Europe's big players. Certain governments, including Italy's, urged and obtained extraordinary efforts from their citizens in order to attain membership. Other governments, as is now all too apparent, tampered with their budgets and public finance reports. In that respect the euro was not just a monetary agreement; it was viewed as a key to accessing a new society and a new lifestyle, effectively taking on symbolic connotations of identity.

The euro, however, not only catered for the continent's needs and ambitions, it also - once more - coincided with the

strategic and economic needs of the United States. The US and the UK traditionally opposed the establishment of common European political entity, which, given its potential size and power, threatened Anglo-Saxon supremacy. The collapse of the West's Soviet enemy during the early 90s and the rise of new powers and new challenges elsewhere in the world, sparked the Clinton administration's resolve to strengthen European allies' political, economic and even monetary standing. In his essay *The United States and Europe: from Primacy to Partnership?* Daalder submits that Clinton believed that Europe's markets, economies, security forces and democracies united could best serve the United States' interests. The reasons for this line of thought were essentially twofold:

1. a united, democratic Europe would not have triggered new wars or instability, as had been the case for most the 20th century, with the US forced to intervene at great human and economic cost;
2. a strong, pacified Europe would rank as a loyal partner, supporting the US in its efforts to address worldwide changes and opportunities, serving the interests of the continent as well as those of the US.

European nations were being asked to take on a more substantial role within NATO, to promote its brand of post-war pacification and democratisation throughout the rest of Europe, take on a bigger share of the military and economic onus in the world's hot spots – such as in the Balkans and the Middle East (Daalder, 2002).

In other words, economic unification - which the common currency stood to represent - was endorsed by Washington with a view to harness European support for America's interests and policies.

#### 4. The Creation of a European Identity

Clinton's hopes of an understanding with Europe on a political and ideal footing - based on the broader democratisation of a united, allied Europe - were soon thwarted. In several major policy areas, including the environment, nuclear proliferation and human rights, Europe and the US were at loggerheads. Opposition turned to entrenchment, breeding frustration - and, ultimately, unilateralism - in the US and a growing drive for autonomy - issuing in the successful launch of the common currency - and identity in Europe.

The latter process intensified under the Bush administration. While the 9/11 attacks may have initially established a common Western and anti-Islamic ground - along the clash of civilisations lines, as described by Huntington -, with Europe naturally espousing the American agenda, the Bush administration's military intervention in Iraq proved hugely divisive. While breeding a cultural divide between 'Old Europe' and the United States and spawning a debate on European identity (or lack thereof), the Iraq issue also led to economic diversification and, ultimately,

monetary competition - dimming the common currency's actual standing in respect of the dollar.

Under the George W. Bush administration, the Gulf States - for years staunch allies of the US - responded to warmongering Middle East policies by downsizing their contribution to supporting American debt and by diversifying towards the euro. Such monetary policy moves were matched by the Chinese, who also contributed to the euro's decade long appreciation against the dollar.

In Jeffrey Frankel's words "The euro, however, was a credible challenger: Euroland is roughly as big as the United States, and the euro has shown itself a better store of value than the dollar [...]. In 2005, when Menzie Chinn and I used historical data on central bank holdings of foreign exchange reserves to estimate the determinants, even our pessimistic scenarios did not have the euro overtaking the dollar until 2022. Thus we could not have asserted that the dollar would be dethroned ten years from now.

"But the dollar has continued to lose ground. We have now updated our calculations, particularly to recognize that London is usurping Frankfurt's role as the financial capital of the euro, notwithstanding the fact that the UK remains outside of EMU. Now we find that the tipping point could come within the ten-year horizon: the euro could overtake the dollar even as early as 2015." (Chinn M., Frankel J., 2008).

In an article published by Italy's *La Repubblica* in 2003, Ralph Darhendorf submitted that it is hard to define European identity and harder still to distinguish it from Western identity, since both share common values - grounded in the Enlightenment -, foremost among them freedom. Darhendorf went on to add that the values, that Europe, America and others share, deserved to be defended via an alliance. Moreover he says that when it comes to discerning values any attempt to divide European and American traditions, is unwise. Assigning the building of Europe any un-American qualities - albeit unintentionally - would be intellectually unfair, morally suspect and politically dangerous for all Europeans who love liberty.<sup>2</sup> But there is more at stake in the US and in Europe than the abovementioned value systems.

Three issues come to the fore in Darhendorf's thoughts. Firstly, the way in which collective identities are built. Secondly, values: do the United States and the European Union share common values or are the differences such that a gap has developed? Thirdly, the role of the euro in the global economy and its geopolitical standing in respect of the dollar.

Let us address the first issue in view of the issues raised by the debate on identity building. One should not forget that the American constitution itself is rooted in the former colonials' rebellion against Crown rule. The American Constitution opposed federal government to British

2 Ralf Dahrendorf, *La tentazione anti -USA dell'identità europea*, La Repubblica, 19 febbraio 2003.

monarchy. The European Union's establishment has been underpinned by similar differentiation and detachment phenomena. Faced with opposition to the Iraqi invasion by France and Germany, Secretary of State Rumsfeld conjured up the description of 'Old Europe', refusing to address his counterparts as single nations but as part of a peculiar European subject, with a peculiar feature: *old*. The then President of the European Commission, Mr. Prodi, was to subsequently change this definition to *wise*.

Any new identity, regardless of whether supranational, regional or local, requires definitions of cultural peculiarities as well as of the political motives determining the use thereof; only through such labels is one able to interact with others, as allowing quickly and effectively to identify personal features and behaviours. In fact, all personal relationships, whether individual or collective, are based on a process of self-identification and self-positioning, classification of 'others' based on set behavioural expectations. Effectively, the perception of another as either *old* or *unchanging* is arrived at in opposition to *young* and *dynamic*, thus requiring one's own definition of self-identity in conjunction with that of another's, via stereotyped constructs.

Significantly, when we need to decide a programme or project, the way others appear is essential to determining our behaviour towards them. Old fashioned *regard* for others is none other than our perception of others' judgement; this perception can affect our relationships both positively or negatively. Prejudice is thus a cognitive category which fulfils our expectations; it clarifies the course of action and potential outcomes. At the same time, prejudice can be a plight, burdening individuals and communities to either conform to, or escape, set behavioural standards.

Following that line of thought, we can only conclude that the building of a European identity is already underway; in fact it is a process bolstered by international policy divisions with the United States – e.g. the Kyoto protocol, the role of international courts, the Iraq war and the fight against international terrorism. Dahrendorf was to later acknowledge strong cultural differences between Americans and Europeans, putting Bush's electoral success down to the so-called 3Gs: *guns, gays e God*. The first of the 3Gs underscores a value system and a culture defined by the right to bear arms (at home and abroad), on staunch objection to gay culture and on religion.

Access to and use of firearms is held in low regard in Europe. According to Dahrendorf "Firearms hold a different place in the European mind. What matters most, as far as the majority is concerned, is their absence." European society favours rule of law and governing institutions to self-defence rights. Despite recurrent shooting rampages and uncontrolled violence in the US, American society favours the idea that the individual is best protected by the right to bear arms.

The second of the 3Gs underscores Europe's greater tolerance - especially in northern and central Europe - compared to the US. Dahrendorf underscores that "the part played by the *politically correct* (homosexual) issue, has

thus far been underestimated." In fact, a contributing factor in the Democrats' presidential election defeat was the stance taken by specific sectors of the party's more liberal wing concerning the issue of same-sex unions (as practiced in certain States and, more notably, in San Francisco).

The third of the 3Gs stands for *God*, and the importance of religion in the United States: 80% of Americans describe themselves as believers; a conspicuous proportion among them is creationist - namely, they dismiss Darwinian evolution and believe in the Bible's account of creation. Religion has always played a big part in American society, right from the outset, but in recent years has acquired such prominence as to sway electoral outcomes, warranting candidates' displays of personal faith as a means to secure consensus - President Bush offering a fitting example.

According to Dahrendorf, however, "religion is unlikely to take political centre-stage in Europe; surveys show that the attendance of religious functions is among the factors distinguishing America and Europe."<sup>3</sup> Proof in that direction is the fact - despite Italy's insistence and Vatican pressure - that the European Constitution carries no reference to Europe's Christian roots. The EU's central and northern European members defended secularism as central to European identity. And the same goes for France and French identity. Forbidding public displays of the Muslim veil, the Christian crucifix and the Jewish kippa, France has sought to ban public displays of faith in all areas pertaining to the state. That stance differs radically with respect to America's, whose citizens view religion as central to both the country's identity and it's founding by the Mayflower pilgrims.

Picking up on Dahrendorf's analysis, European and American views on reality, values and society widely differ. It bears stressing that there are several issues which - on both sides of the Atlantic - are perceived as defining Europe as a unique entity unto itself. The building of a European identity is already underway and is, in fact, gaining strength due to divisions with the United States concerning such issues as international policy, the environment, international justice and pre-emptive warfare.

Undeniably, at the turn of the new Millennium, European public opinion - especially in Italy, the UK and Spain - heavily opposed America's Middle East policies. At odds with the public's opposition, governments chose to support America's plans for Iraq, sparking mass demonstrations throughout Europe.

The latter developments questioned perceptions of Western identity, breeding a differentiation between those of Europe and the US. The years witnessing Middle East conflict and the birth of the euro also witnessed a radical shift in perceptions concerning Americans. To the extent that according to one survey (Eurisko, 2003), 57.1% of Italians did not view the United States as a model for freedom and democracy. Furthermore, 59.9% viewed American ideals

3 R. Dahrendorf, *Politica tra simboli e valori*, La Repubblica, 31 marzo 2005, p.17.

and the American model as a threat to Italy's culture and traditions. American foreign policy began to be no longer perceived as breeding security, but - failing to account for other nations' interests and as the root cause of worldwide wealth disparities - as a threat.

America and the characterisation of Americans along these lines vary from country to country. It is weakest in East Europe and strongest in France - significantly, one publication accuses French academics and textbooks of a grossly distorted portrayal of the US, ranking Islamic terrorism as arising in response to American hegemony and laying the blame for all manner of planetary ills on America's doorstep (Lefebvre and Bonnard, 2005).

Recent developments have also failed to improve America's image. The subprime crisis spawned in the US had knock-on effects on Europe and fed the idea that unfettered ultra-liberalism required reining in via strict regulatory frameworks. Likewise, American observers sought to characterise Europe as being too conservative, chained down by over-regulation and too cautious.

In light of Darhendorf's assessments, such outright opposition arises in response to perceptions that would have the United States' actions threaten the values and ideals previously thought of as part of a shared Western heritage. Opposition to military intervention in Iraq arises from the understanding that "war is always wrong" and that "there are more effective ways of containing Saddam and the threat he poses that are not based on violence." The very idea of pre-emptive warfare, as outlined by the Bush administration, clashed with the very principles of peaceful international coexistence - as aspired to by the West via the establishment of the Society of Nations (also thanks to President Wilson) and the United Nations. Domestic and international democracy is based on shared rules and respect for human rights. The 9/11 attacks, however, bred a fear of Muslim terrorists in the US for many years which took precedence over democratic legitimacy - Guantanamo detentions without charge or public trial offering just one example.

During the early years of the third millennium the United States came to be perceived as *aggressive, imperialist, arrogant and violent*; perceptions far removed from the view held of the US at the close of WWII as the warden of *democracy, freedom and justice*.

The latter shift came to the fore in collective imaginings, in *us and them* stereotypes. American movies have always resorted to strong stereotyping, even national, to define characters and behaviours. European stereotypes in Hollywood are rife; in 'The Beach', movie star Leonardo Di Caprio plays a young American who meets a French couple on a Thai island; the three share horrific adventures. The couple come across as European rather than French, and their actions set them apart from their American friend:

- *non violent*: Di Caprio turns into a sort of Rambo and faces local pirates. The European avoids and disapproves of violence;
- *humanitarian*: a shark injures a member of the community; everybody deserts him and only the

European refuses to let him die alone in the forest. It will be Di Caprio who will finish him off, when they are forced to flee;

- *altruist* and *permissive*: the European unflinchingly accepts that his girlfriend should leave him for the American, and only worries about her happiness;
- *cautious* and *sedentary*: it is the American who makes them eager for adventure. Faced with risk, Europeans appear perplexed and reluctant.

Old, wise, cautious, humanitarian, legalist: this is how Europeans appear to Americans; they are also portrayed as *ungrateful, backstabbers* and *wily*. This breeds identification with the lead character's traits: *young, adventurous* and *brave*, as well as *loyal, generous* and *caring* (care provided even when unsolicited).

## 5. European Values and Behavioural Models

Summing up our previous considerations, it bears noting that identity-building processes rest on a common set of processes, issuing in:

- symbol systems, allowing for a people's direct identification, including flags, national anthems, and currencies;
- collective rituals, ceremonies, public holidays, etc., underscoring historical events to which a symbolic importance has been attached;
- behavioural codes of conduct and values inspired by mythical societies of forefathers (as inspired by historical accounts), providing a template for a future society.

Is Europe merely an expanded economic bloc built on entrenched autonomies, or is a new collective identity emerging? With reference to common symbols, Europe boasts all the apparel of identity, namely it has a flag, anthem, motto and currency. The latter, as proved by the dollar, is especially important: the dollar is a symbol of US power and a means for Washington to project its influence worldwide. A founding element of the American myth, the dollar's relevance in the collective imagination is especially apparent in movies. Sergio Leone's so-called Western "dollar trilogy" is a worldwide cinema classic; repeated references to the dollar in Leone's Italian titles (i.e. *Dollari che scottano*, *Dollari sporchi*, *Un dollaro di fifa* and *Un dollaro d'onore*) testify to the dollar's special significance.

The dollar has, indeed, taken on special connotations in the collective European imagination. WWII had left Europe's peoples impoverished, fighting inflation and tackling devaluation and their circumstances were changed by massive American investments. Hence the dollar's exceptional connotations, its portrayal as an instrument and go-between for wealth and power.

The dollar's myth-making connotations were also reinforced during the 60s by the likes of Andy Warhol,

whose Marilyn Monroe and Coca Cola paintings feature a dollar symbol; a choice which, in numbers, adds strength to several of his later, serial works.

The euro cannot compete with the dollar when it comes to image and myth. Despite its undeniable merits, the common currency is deemed more fragile than the dollar, as confirmed by several studies conducted on the image of Europe and the common currency carried out in 2005 in China, the US and India. "The euro, per se, is not fully taken seriously since there is no denying that it does not yet represent a credible alternative to the dollar.' Further enlargement of the Eurozone, however, might change this. Some Indian officials highlight the fact that 'the euro has enabled the European Union to define for itself a distinct characteristic which, through expansion over the next twenty years or so, should mean we will be dealing with a unified bloc'. Critical, to this, however, would be the UK's joining. 'Only then, a stronger Eurozone, reinforced by Britain's participation, will appear truly internationally credible.' (K. Lisbonne de Vergeron, 2005, p.33).

Although Indian commentators suggest that actual governmental union is a long way off, there are signs - as testified by common anniversaries and festivities - indicating a strengthening of the common identity.

As of 1985 Europe has also celebrated the May 9 anniversary, marking French foreign minister Schuman's announcement of proposals to underwrite industrial, economic and political cooperation agreements with Germany (and other European countries) designed to avert future wars.

As much as the popularity and importance of the May 9 anniversary may not be remotely comparable to that of national anniversaries such Bastille Day in France, other types of European events are starting to take hold from the bottom up. White Night art festivals, for example, kicked off in Berlin and were subsequently staged in Paris, Rome, Madrid, Riga, Brussels and Bucharest; another example is offered by Museum Nights, held on May 14 every year. The latter events seek to establish a common identity by leveraging Europe's culture and heritage, its monuments and museums, and by seeking to inform the broader public of Europe's track record in the areas of arts, humanities and science - spanning its millennial history, from Ancient Greece to Rome, from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, right up to the present day. Such events seek to underscore the very essence of European identity, the very brand of European heritage that euro banknotes symbolically convey.

As with any one society, Europe's culture goes beyond the arts, the humanities and science, spilling over into its institutions, behavioural models, rules and value systems. As previously noted, national identities draw on a historical past, on former models for society and on behavioural models underlying the latter. A survey into leading European personalities (Jeanneney e Joutard, 2003), both historical and contemporary, carried out in six European countries - France, Spain, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy and Poland - offers an interesting perspective. Interviewees were asked to

choose the personalities "best representing European identity" from a list of 14 'greats'. The highest number of preferences fell with Leonardo da Vinci with a 25% share, followed by Christopher Columbus on 21% and Martin Luther on 19%. The fact that, between them, the above three clinched just under two thirds of total preferences is hugely significant. They each emerged during the Renaissance, a time of extraordinary change which ultimately established the value systems and ideals on which Western democracies are based to this day: *freedom of religion, pursuit of new worlds, scientific innovation, excellence in the arts, as well as capitalism.*

They are iconic figures marking the transition from the Middle Ages - based on sacred thought - to the Modern Age - based on the primacy of man. The survey underscored a natural preference for Renaissance greats over such icons of the Middle Ages as Charlemagne, St Francis of Assisi and St Teresa of Avila. The survey's results are anything but according to script, especially given present-day religious terrorism and civilisation clash scenarios (Huntington, 2000). Interviewees could just as easily have expressed a preference for medieval European figureheads; in fact, despite faltering communications and internal wars, during the Middle Ages Europe stood to offer a fairly homogeneous cultural background. Our understanding of Europe also appears to be largely connected with the idea of modernity as formally enunciated during the French Revolution. Moving along the timeline, and investigating the outstanding personalities of the 19th and 20th centuries, the survey ranks Winston Churchill - an archenemy of German totalitarianism, with 22% of preferences - and Charles de Gaulle - a symbol of freedom and democracy, with 19% - as Europe's figureheads. Alongside them is scientist Marie Curie. What we have is a leading trio, summarizing values of freedom, democracy, science, women's emancipation and European integration.

The survey reveals European public opinion's firm grounding in the principles of Enlightenment, which first took hold in England, passed over to France during the Revolution and spread to the rest of Europe during the Napoleonic wars. While a popular figure in many European countries, Napoleon reaped a mere 14% of preferences. That this should be the case is, to a certain extent, understandable, given that the brand of progress and unification brought about under his rule - via, for example, the adoption of the legal system of codes in place of outdated feudal norms - was achieved through force and the Republic's dismantlement and - in the collective imagination - ultimately served Napoleon's personal ambitions of empire.

Conclusions drawn based on the above survey are validated by other surveys addressing European and American public opinion concerning fundamental issues relating to war, international affairs and the role of the UN. Jointly conducted by the German Marshall Fund and by the Company of St Paul, the survey reveals marked differences in several areas between the two sides of the Atlantic. On the issue of war, 80% of Americans felt that war can be resorted to not just as a means of self-defence but as a means of



obtaining justice. That view is shared by only 41% of Europeans. That difference of opinion is echoed in assessments on the Iraq war: 80% of Europeans opposed the war, compared to 50% of Americans. Positions also differ with respect to international affairs with only 44% of Europeans agreeing on the fact that the UN can be sidestepped when national interest is at stake. US counterparts endorse the latter view in 59% of cases, indicating a marked propensity to dismiss international rule of law and a refusal to partake in a common global governance.

As much as American public opinion appears to endorse both the exercise of power through use of force and a view of America as exercising legitimate imperial ambitions, American perceptions of Europe are far more flattering than Europe's perceptions of America. With 60% of Americans favouring closer relations with Europe, 63% of Europeans strive for greater autonomy and military clout, in order to pursue a separate international agenda. What is, perhaps, even more surprising is that close to 80% of Americans also favour the prospect of a stronger, independent Europe - regardless of whether or not that would involve separate agendas. Within the Democrat constituency especially, Americans express a desire for greater cooperation with Europe, especially on a military footing. In Europe much as in America, several constituencies arise; in Europe's case, along national lines. The British and the Dutch, for instance, tend to favour military action more than their French, German, Spanish and Italian counterparts. In fact, despite their respective governments' policy choices, the latter group of citizens provide a homogeneous body of opinion on issues of war and peace.

Obama's presidency has not really changed the perception that Europeans have of the U.S. role and ideology. Indeed, although most of the American soldiers were withdrawn from the theatres of war, the use of drones and special forces have helped maintaining in the European opinion the image of U.S. as a guardian of world order. In addition, the Republican primary campaign that ended with Donald Trump as the presidential nominee, possibly in a tied race for presidency against Democrats, is placing many questions about American values and the preservation of civil rights, in particular regarding the protection of minorities.

Certainly Trump positions are shared by politicians of some European countries and in the rise of populist and nationalist parties within Europe. The epochal change in the modes of production and labour market is progressively eliminating whole professional categories, as the result of technological innovation and automation. The resulting economic crisis has eased in recent years the emergence of radical positions, national closures and irrational fears. This is leading to a progressive establishment of xenophobic and populist parties, often with neo fascist tendencies, with a strength that varies from country to country. In those nations that have acceded recently to the European Union and that have a young democratic system, the problem

appears to be severe and their national democratic institutions risk drifts.

What was the reaction of the politicians and of the European Parliament in front of the emergence of these problems, made more acute by refugees, fleeing from the theatres of war and seeking asylum in Europe? By Matteo Renzi to Angela Merkel, by Jean-Claude Juncker to Martin Schulz all have invoked the founding values of Europe, reiterating the importance of rights, freedom, and respect for the other. For example, on the occasion of the agreements between the EU and Turkey on the repatriation of migrants, Matteo Renzi has insisted on an explicit reference to human rights, freedom of the speech and the founding values of Europe in the final statement. Tusk in turn has remarked that: "freedom of speech is the hallmark of Europe".

It should be however noted that the vast majority of European citizens, when confronted with the difficulties that first the economic crisis and now the arrival of migrants accounted for, asked for greater involvement of Europe, not for a return to isolationist practices. And where, as in Austria, a xenophobic right-wing success arrived thanks to a widespread protest vote, the reaction from the rest of the population led a firm pro-European to guide the country. In a similar fashion, in France, a common front against Front National was built in several national and administrative elections with the aim of protecting the Republican values become founding of European identity.

## 6. Closing Remarks

The above perceptions of European and American identity are confirmed by Chinese surveys. The surveys' authors underscore the perception of Europe as a peace-loving nation, which lacks a specific drive to engage in military conflict. According to one interviewee "Europe, I think, is more at peace. It is different to the United States; they appear to be busy intervening everywhere, every day" (Zheng *et al.*, 2003, p. 74). Other interviewees assign Europe a role in containing US power in both the economic and geopolitical arenas.

The Chinese public opinion of Europe as a balancing world force is accompanied by a perception of Europe as "synonymous to human progress, external openness, concern for the broader general interest, economic and military cooperation" (ibid. pp. 72-73). The latter views combine with a marked anti-US prejudice, with Americans characterised as despicable and warmongering: "I think the European Union has a tough 10 or even 20 years ahead of it. But things will improve after that. The United States will challenge its establishment any way they can. The press has said that the United States attacked Yugoslavia to create tensions within the European Union and stifle the euro" (ibid. p. 75).

As much as they are either rooted in fantasy or unreliable, such negative assessments offer a glimpse of the fact that identity is a process and, as such, subject to change. Until

only a few decades ago views of the US on par with those above would have been unheard of; likewise, Chinese public opinion would have lacked a reference framework through which to define a European identity. Today, however, Parag Khanna ranks the EU as being among three world-shaping Great Empires, alongside China and the US. In his view "the EU is by far the most willingly accepted and successful empire in history, since instead of dominating it educates. Incentives towards Europeanisation - Brussels' subsidies, unfettered mobility, the common currency - carry far too many advantages to be ignored." The European Union is expanding not in virtue of its might but thanks to the attraction it exerts on its neighbours, placing membership requirements based on "the assimilation of EU rules and regulations" (Khanna, 2009, p. 40).

While viewing Europe's chances of competing outright with the US on an economic footing, Indian commentators think of the European Union as a model in its own right.

'Some of the mechanisms Europeans have used to create their internal economic area and shape the relationship between political and economic government are very relevant for us.' In particular, there is considerable official interest in EU competition law and the management of structural funds. "Again, Europe's achievement is in using economic integration as the means to overcome political animosities and insecurities" (K. Lisbonne-de Vergeron, p. 29)

It bears stressing, however, that a European state is not a thing of the present. International speculation and sovereign debt crises in southern Europe is proving, once more, that a common identity and a single currency are weak if lacking a legislative and governance structure. In response to the need for effective economic and monetary governance, European public opinion's demand for a political merger between eurozone countries has gained in strength. As evidenced by Eurobarometer surveys, such demands are not just privy to editorials and televised debates, with a majority of interviewees - percentages ranging between 70 and 80% - pointing to the need for greater economic policy coordination within the eurozone, tighter international oversight with respect to major financial operators, tighter control over banks bailed out with public money, and the EU's adoption of a leading role in regulating financial markets (Eurobarometer 2011).

European public opinion appears to tend to lead governments on the issue of European integration - at least as far as economic integration is concerned, with the euro perceived as the true driver of EU unity. European Central Bank board member Lorenzo Smaghi states "My main thesis is that monetary union entails in itself a much greater degree of political union than many commentators, politicians, academics and even the public ever thought. This is due to the fact that, in a monetary union, decisions taken in some parts affect other parts, in a very direct and sometimes dramatic way". The reason for that is that "we already have a political union" (Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, 2011).

What is required is a proper system of governance, in order to forego any further ambiguity. Europe can no longer forego addressing the demands placed on the Union by current developments. Despite domestic resistance and short-sighted national concerns, what we are witnessing are small hesitant steps towards the only valid requirement: the euro needs to be protected as it is now a symbol of European identity. The euro is forcing European countries to replace coordination and embrace common governance. Markets will not hold off and the time available to do so is scant.

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