CONSTRUCTING THE EUROPEAN IDENTITY - TRAP OR GAP?
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION BETWEEN COMMUNITY-BUILDING AND PATH-DEPENDENCY

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Constructing the European identity - Trap or gap?

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and Path-dependency

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Abstract

This article scrutinises the application of collective political identity construction as a political concept to the process of European integration. As a starting point for my approach I take the recurring demands for a European identity which reflects a strong link between democratic legitimacy and the EU. Given the \textit{sui generis} nature of the European integration process, I argue that these perceptions derive from the nation-building processes of the 18th and 19th centuries rather than reflecting the experience of an incremental political integration process. Contrary to the generalised assumption that identity construction is a prerequisite for political integration in Europe or the ‘missing link’, my argument is that European identity should rather be treated as a possible end product. Applying a strong path-dependence model to European integration risks stepping into an ‘identity trap’, which constrains indispensable systemic flexibility.

Keywords: European identity, EU identity politics, path-dependency

Introduction

Due to rising levels of political, economic and cultural heterogeneity, and the prospect of a multi-speed integration process, the debate about European identity construction could have been expected to disappear from the academic and political agenda. And not a few political scientists have argued that the enlarged European Union (EU) with its now 27 members will fail to lay the basis for a ‘pan-European identity’ (Billig, 1995; Niethammer, 2000b; Dobson and Weale, 2003). However, it seems that the attractiveness of this socio-political concept \textit{per se} has not suffered from these realist, intergovernmentalist and state-centric accounts (Buonanno and Deakin, 2004). When looking at how the notion of European identity has influenced the current discussion about a European constitution, it will, on the contrary, appear that the issue has retained its salience.\footnote{See the Conference on European identity in Salzburg (‘Sound of Europe’, 27-28 January 2006), attended by the Heads of States or governments of France, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland and Latvia. Also present were Germany’s foreign minister, the EU Commission President, the President of the European Parliament and a number of high profile academics and artists.}
Most contributions to European identity explored the concept’s historico-political and/or socio-psychological roots (Ahrweiler, 1993; Hale, 1993; Axford et al., 2000; Burke, 2000; Orluc, 2000). In recent years, more empirically oriented case studies have been conducted, providing different perspectives from national and regional levels (Boym, 2000; Gerber, 2000; Marcussen and Roscher, 2000; Strath, 2000). Finally, the concept found its way into the integration theoretical discourse. Primarily concerned with the end-product of European integration, scholars searched for desirable forms of political collective identity on supranational level (Mayer and Palmowski, 2004). Whereas ethnically based identity models were soon collectively dismissed (Kostakopoulou, 2001), the debate revolved around normative-ontological forms, such as constitutional patriotism (Habermas, 1992), postmaterialist citizenship (Duchesne and Frognier, 1995), multi-identitism (Kritzinger, 1999), utilitarian and civic identity (Lord, 1998), post-nationalism and supranationalism (Lacroix, 2004), or cosmopolitan-communitarianism (Bellamy and Castiglione, 2004).

Many of these accounts of European identity formation and construction, however, overlook the complexity of collectivisation processes, their conditions and constrains (see Niethammer, 2000a; Eder, 2002). Apparently missing in the discussion is a more process-oriented account of the practical feasibility and necessity of EU identity politics. In this context, the fundamental question, of whether European collective identity should be regarded as a missing link to a successful, stable and democratic European Union is examined.

Assessing collective identity formation processes necessarily raises significant conceptual and methodological problems (Smith, 1992; Breakwell and Lyons, 1996; Cinnirella, 1996; Strath, 2002). Hence to avoid the theoretical traps of operationalization and definition, the focus of my analysis will therefore avoid questions of historical existence, form or desirability of European identity. Applying a modernist-constructivist approach on identity building, I rather seek to explore the conditions of collective identity construction and the utility of European identity as a political instrument. The inspiration for this study came from Kostakopoulou’s claim, that ‘most academics tend to view European identity as the “mirror image” of national identity and apply concepts, models and practices associated with the nation-state and/or federal systems to the EC/EU”

Following Buonanno and Deakin’s (2004) categorization of identity formation processes, which differentiates four explanatory theories: 1. Primordialist/essentialist (Smith, 1992; Gellner, 1983; Nanz, 2000); 2. Postmodernists (Ruggie, 1993); 3. Post-nationalist (Habermas, 1974, 1991, 1992; Delanty, 1995); 4. Modernist (Grew 1986; Anderson, 1983; and Hobsbawm, 1990). It should be noted here that the constructivist approach treats identity formation as a process ‘from above’, i.e. through the mechanisms of policy making. Reverse processes have been discussed by Soysal (2002).
(Kostkopoulou, 2001: 14), which I found intriguing but not sufficiently developed. Consequently, I chose Rokkan’s model on nation-building which he based on Almond and Pye’s crisis theory (Pye, 1968) in order to scrutinise the European integration process on its political community-building capacities. In doing so my approach differs from existing comparisons between state-building processes and the European integration process (Caporaso, 1996; Marks, 1997) and in particular that of Van Kersbergen (2000), who also applied a Rokkanian model.

The main argument of this paper is that the two main pre-requisites to allow European collective identity construction are not fulfilled: a) the willingness of the European peoples to belong to a supra-political entity and b) the possession of identity forming instruments by a central authority. Taking into account the constantly renewed construction of national identity in the member states, I claim that attempts by the European Union – especially the European Commission – to institute some kind of European identity politics lacks instrumental power, which explains the absence of measurable effects. In general, this argumentation is based on realist accounts of International Relations, and, more specifically, with regards to regional integration, on intergovernmentalist and liberal-intergovernmentalist theory.3

The paper further attempts to assess the same issue form a more normative-theoretical perspective, i.e. the question of whether EU identity politics are in fact necessary to create a more legitimate basis for political integration. Here, I demonstrate that the idea of deriving legitimacy from collectivization originates in the historical nation-building processes in Western Europe prior to the 20th century. I claim that perceiving identity formation as a key condition of European integration risks applying a path-dependency model that does not allow for indispensable systemic flexibility. The model of nation-building proves to be inadequate as a blueprint for the supra-national building of the European Union and that identity formation should be regarded as a possible end-product rather than a prerequisite for a successful integration process.

**European identity as political instrument and political vision**

It is important to note that the introduction of European identity as a collective political basis for the European integration process happened for certain reasons and at a certain time. The launch of the Single Market project and the extension of the economic community towards a political union not only challenged the

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3 I refer to the works of Hoffmann (1966), Moravcsik (1998) and Milward (2000).
institutional, organisational and administrative structures of the integration process, it also raised fundamental questions of democratisation and legitimisation. It is therefore not surprising that from the late 1980s onwards, European identity became an increasingly popular notion within political and academic discourse (Smith, 1992; Habermas, 1992, 1998a; Delanty, 1995; Howe, 1995; Kostakopoulou, 2001). It not only influenced the philosophical discourse about the nature of the European integration process, but increasingly found its way into official and semi-official documents of the European Union (Kostakopoulou, 2001; Höjelid, 2001). Eventually, European identity became a standard demand of Europhile political rhetoric, a reference point for numerous declarations from local, regional, national, supranational and global agencies.

What has made the concept of European identity so widespread, especially since it proves to be virtually un-definable? The various interpretations of the nature of European identity range from pre-modern historical-religious accounts to post-national/supranational descriptions, from cultural over territorial frameworks to the different forms of political communitisation. It appears that it is exactly the lack of precision and common agreement that contributes to its usefulness and attractiveness. European identity proves to be a highly flexible political instrument (Walkenhorst, 1999), which can be assigned to different contexts, such as to be found in ‘Europe’s identity’, ‘European security identity’ and the ‘identity of the European Union on the international stage’.

Understanding the phenomenology of European identity depends upon the ontological perspective of the observer. Speaking of Europe’s historical and cultural identity refers to a commonly perceived past with common values and common roots. In social terms, European identity is aimed at reflecting the political aspirations of the EU to increase the people’s attachment to the integration process in a long-term perspective and the need for cross-national solidarity. Here, European identity reflects the idea of a social framework which merges the political aim of an ‘ever closer union’ with that of a ‘people’s Europe’, responding to the notorious claim of a distanced, technocratic and elite-driven European project, which never created legitimacy ‘from below’.

From a political viewpoint, a collective political identity usually shows a strong prospective connotation; something to be yet achieved. The reason for this is that European identity seemingly offers to perfectly fill the gap about the final goal of the EU, the so-called finalité politique. The concept proves to be particularly useful in that it does not refer to a more definite, static and therefore more controversial

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4 For a summary see White (2000).
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The British rejection of ‘federalism’ as the future shape of European integration, as articulated during the Maastricht Treaty negotiations (Johansson, 2002: 886), triggered the search for an alternative integration concept and a new long-term strategy. The pressures from the collapse of the communist system and the resulting power vacuum in Central and Eastern Europe, in line with the ambition to build a political union, highlighted the need for an adapted political roadmap with a preferably declared official political-structural aim. Yet, the options available were limited to the classical dichotomy between ‘federation’ and ‘confederation’.

As even newly established notions such as ‘Staatenverbund’ (German Constitutional Court, 1993) did not seem to have an appeal, the idea of a supranational identity-building process entered EU politics as a ‘soft goal’. Although never specified as such in primary EU legislation, politicians and experts alike believed they had found both an overarching goal and a device for securing the momentum of the integration process. Most importantly, however, it became prominent as the manifestation of a common vision, which, due to the openness of the process, is especially important. Another advantage of the identity concept is that it, once successfully created, could be expected to serve as a suitable, and even stronger, replacement for the fading *permissive consensus* which only provided a weak basis for public support. Greater support for, and participation in, the democratic process of integration (‘active citizenship’) would then considerably diminish both the democratic and the legitimacy deficits. In short, the successful creation of a collective European identity promises to serve as a potential solution for the political problems of European integration: the democratic accountability of the EU, the legitimacy deficit, the distance between decision-makers and demos and the lack of public support.

The question of European identity refers to one of the fundamental controversies in the discourse on European Union: whether sustainable political integration is inevitably linked to, or even dependent on, social integration. As Laffan (1996: 96) observed: ‘[T]he need to create a “people’s Europe” and to strengthen the public’s identification with the European project has been a recurring theme in official thinking on European integration since the end of the 1960s.’ As one of the principal promoters of social integration, Karl Deutsch proposed his transactionalist approach, highlighting social communication as the key to successful integration (Deutsch, 1957). The European Commission’s ‘White Paper on Governance’ confirms the lasting salience of the social component of European politics: ‘Our overall goal draws on the simple principle that has guided European integration since the European Community was founded: to integrate the people of Europe, while fully respecting individual national identities’ (European Commission, 2001: 32). Here, European identity is given the prominent status of not only a future
necessity but also a founding principle of the European integration process. With the White Paper, it appears that the normative concept of European identity has inevitably been formulated as a goal of EU policy making.

All these accounts, however, neglect the methods, conditions and instruments necessary to create a politically motivated collective identity. Before discussing the questions of feasibility and necessity of European identity formation, the next section concentrates on the conditions and processes of politically constructed identities from the perspective of identity politics.

**Sources and conditions of identity politics**

Examining the political relevance of collective identity, the most obvious link derives from the study of nationalism. Nationalism, understood from a constructivist perspective, describes the homogenisation of regional groupings for the purpose of nation-building. In order to construct the image, idea and identity of the nation, governments pursue identity politics (Miller, 2000; Young, 1990). These embrace the promotion of state symbolism and mythology, accompanied by a set of policies on language, culture, media, youth and education. Even modern states rely on their monopoly on identity politics in order to create legitimacy and public support.5

Nationalism and national identity creation are not isolated phenomena. Assessing their overwhelming success as instruments for social integration in 18th and 19th century Europe, a significant constellation of conditions becomes apparent. The constructivist school around Anderson, Gellner and Hobsbawm identified unparalleled and fundamental changes in the political and socio-economic environment, which preceded and eventually allowed for the construction of newly defined collective identities (Anderson, 1983; Breuilly, 1982; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990; Hutchinson and Smith, 1994; Kriesi et al., 1999; Rokkan, 1975; Wendt, 1999). Identity politics became the principal instrument of the state to promote social integration, which proved to be essential to secure the legitimacy of the state (Easton, 1965, 1975).

In his seminal work about state and nation-building, Rokkan (1975) identified the political and societal elites as the most important actors in the construction of

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5 The modern democratic state of course has only limited control over the media, and also the direct influence on education varies from state to state. In multi-national and federal states, education (Germany) and also language matters (Belgium, Spain, Canada) are decentralised.
collective identity. Before full mobilisation of the economy and the political masses took place, new linkages between national and local elites proved to be decisive for the consolidation of the governmental system; this gave enough time to build efficient organisations before the nation-building process was activated in terms of national identity, mass participation and redistribution of benefits and resources (Flora, 1999: 130). This ‘period of political, economic, and cultural unification at the elite level’ – state formation – (Rokkan, 1975: 571-2) was followed by what Gellner described as the ‘invention of a national identity’ (Gellner, 1983).

However, this top-down process would not have been sustainable if it had not been supported by popular demand, or, at least, consent from below. The prospect of orientation, belonging and citizenship in the newly established state obviously met the majority of the people’s desire to belong to a culturally, historically and politically homogeneous frame of reference with its clear geographical borders and its centralised source of political authority. This mechanism works at the same time as a tool for exclusion, as it clearly distinguishes between in-group, out-group and enemies (Eisenstadt and Giesen, 1995; Habermas, 1998b), involving highly complex social processes of education, socialisation, recognition and social transactions (Taylor, 1994; Wendt, 1999; Tilly 2002). With the emergence of the welfare state, social policy became a crucial part of identity politics in post-war Western Europe, assuring political stability through popular support and social peace. Because social structures are rather fragile, changeable and contestable constructs (Christiansen et al., 1999), collective political identities need permanent governmental maintenance to balance out various centripetal or centrifugal forces within society (Miller, 2000).

How does the study of nationalism relate to the question of European identity formation? Firstly, within the European integration process structures of supranational identity politics have become visible, such as in the areas of education, youth, media and social policies (Laffan, 1996). Even the Economic and Monetary Union and the euro have been described as a form of identity politics (Engelmann et al., 1997). Secondly, European identity has been repeatedly and officially linked to demands on increased legitimacy. Before assessing the viability of supranational identity politics, however, I explore if, and how far, state-building processes and the process of European integration carry similarities, and whether the nation-building model corresponds with the supranational integration process.

**Political identity construction: nation-state building and regional integration contrasted**

Despite dense geographical proximity, the development of the European state system created a wide range of variations. Several theorists have endeavoured to
condense the huge complexity of the European experience into a single model. The most prominent attempts have been produced and published during the 1960s and 1970s in the USA (see Bendix, 1964; Deutsch, 1957; Pye, 1966; Rokkan, 1975 and Tilly, 1975). The shortcomings of these models notwithstanding, the emergence of the modern ‘bureaucratic-participant state’, as Rokkan et al. (1971: 9) called it, can be separated into different evolutionary stages. The status of collective identity-construction in the course of state and nation-building (Eisenstadt and Rokkan, 1973) is best visible in the following model introduced by Rokkan, which he based on the crisis theory developed by the almost legendary Committee of Comparative Politics led by Almond and Pye.

The three main sequences of nation-building (state-building, nation-building and consolidation of system) suggest an order in which the end-result, the political entity, is achieved by, first formal, (penetration, integration) and then socio-political integration (identity, legitimacy, participation). For a democracy this means, that political structures precede the emergence of a demos, which in turn legitimises the system. The politicisation of identity within this process appears to be, as Vernon (1993) argues, almost inevitable: ‘[I]t is arguably impossible to create politics capable of attracting popular support which does not seek to transcend differences both within and between decentred individual and collective actors with some kind of unifying identity’ (cited in: Tilly, 2002: 22). The overwhelming success of ‘national identity’ as ‘the most fundamental and inclusive of collective identities’ (Smith, 1991: 143) cannot be neglected as it eventually allowed the nation state to become the prominent political unit in world politics.

Yet so, the limitations and constraints of (politically motivated) identity-formation, are often overlooked. Although many attempts to create a national identity succeeded in the last centuries, it would be mistaken to assume an automatic effect of identity politics. When large proportions of the population reject the proposed foundations of national identity, the ‘stateness problem’ occurs (Linz and Stepan, 1992). Lucian Pye (1968, 1971a) identified four basic crisis of national identity formation: territory, class, ethnic divisions, and social change. Examples from modern European history indicate where nation-building failed to create stable and legitimising identity patterns, both in democratic states (Weimar Republic) and authoritarian systems (GDR, USSR). And also parts of several modern and democratic societies suffer from a lack of national collectiveness, exemplified by violent secessionism (Northern Ireland, the Basque country, Corsica). It is therefore essential to note that identity politics do not guarantee a positive effect by default. They can be rejected by parts or even the majority of the population, causing in turn de-legitimising and de-stabilising effects.
### Table 1: Model of State- and Nation-building

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Crisis, Challenge, Problem</th>
<th>Institutional solution, examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>State-building</strong></td>
<td><strong>Penetration</strong></td>
<td>Establishment of a rational bureaucracy in order to mobilize resources (taxes, work force), to create public order and coordinate tasks (development of infrastructure, defence, crisis management)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Integration</strong></td>
<td>Establishment of rules in order to guarantee equal access to the public sector, values and resources for different cultural and political groupings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nation-building</strong></td>
<td><strong>Identity</strong></td>
<td>Establishment of media systems and institutions in order to socialize the citizens: schools, information and communication systems, institutionalized rites and symbols (myths, flags, anthems etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Legitimacy</strong></td>
<td>Efforts to create loyalty and trust among the citizens in favour of respective political institutions; efforts to secure obedience to the law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Participation</strong></td>
<td>Extension of franchise for formerly unprivileged groups, protection of minority rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Distribution</strong></td>
<td>Establishment of institutions in order to promote social security, income adjustment through progressive taxation and financial balancing between prosperous and poor regions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Rokkan (1979). This model was given preference to the more renowned model Rokkan published later in his career (see Rokkan, 1975) because of its separate identity-building section. The original and more sophisticated account of the crisis theory was presented by Pye in 1968 (Pye 1968).

Reviewing nation-building processes illustrates that collective identity is not simply a result of implementing top-down identity politics (see Tilly, 2002). Most importantly, certain domestic conditions have to be met in order to achieve a situation where elites or societal majorities allow a government to replace older identity structures with new ones. These situations can occur in cases of a power vacuum, internal revolution, long term changes in the social composition of states, international conflict or war. From a historical perspective, it appears to be rather a combination of fundamental changes in the (internal and/or external) socio-political environment that trigger changes in collective identity patterns. According to Howe (1995: 45), ‘it is no single factor alone that determines the readiness of a population to receive and digest new beliefs about the boundaries of community. What matters is the cumulative impact of a whole series of conditions’.
Difficulties and peculiarities of supranational community-building

It is important to note that, from a constructivist perspective, it would be wrong to claim the impossibility of supranational identity construction; Switzerland, Canada and Belgium are prominent examples of successful multinational community-building processes (Howe, 1995: 30). If certain prerequisites and conditions were fulfilled, even in a world of globalisation and growing economic interdependence the emergence of new post-national political identities is possible, at least thinkable. The aim of this and the next section is to scrutinise the extra- and intra-political conditions for collective community building in the European context.

To begin with, the historical-geographical and socio-political characteristics of Europe as a continent have generated a ‘multiple identity area’ of overlapping territorial and historical spaces at local, regional and national territorial level. This constellation, however, translates into a ‘multiple identity problem’ when viewed from the supranational perspective. It has repeatedly been stressed that Europe as a continent does not provide for a geographical frame of reference that could translate into ‘politico-territorial rule’, an essential part of collective identity formation (Elias, 1969, cited in Bornschier, 2000: 8). Europeans have also not created an ethnos in the proto-national sense (Lord, 1998; Blavoukos and Sigalas, 2000). Garcia (1993: 2) concludes: ‘In contrast with the process of nation-building, elements such as a common language and education, free-flowing labour markets, and a civic-minded society, with full rights of citizenship, are not there.’

Referring back to the importance of elite coalitions emphasised by Rokkan, the current status of the integration process shows a high level of consolidation. This is, however, only true with regard to the economic dimension of the European Union, which has received sufficient elite support and promotion. The single market programme and the single currency can be construed as the result of a Europe-wide consensus among political and economic elites (Dyson, 2002: 9), who have largely disregarded public opinion and popular support. On the political dimension, however, the lack of elite consensus is easily displayed by the continuing difficulties of system reform (especially the post-Maastricht process), the introduction of multiple forms of governance (flexibility, opt-outs, closer cooperation, open method of coordination), and overall disagreement about the finalité of the integration process. The third condition of identity formation, as noted above, is that of popular demand or public preparedness. People in Europe primarily relate to the already existing structures of nationally defined collectives. No major popular movement has yet emerged that demands supranationalism and that could initiate some kind of pro-supranationalist revolution. On the contrary, there appears to be a growing and intensifying group of people who seem to collectivise on the basis of being anti-European, especially in Britain (Stravrakakis, 2005).
To be sure, it is not only the conditionality of European integration which fails to create an identity formation friendly environment; the difference in political-procedural terms also has to be taken into account. Using the Rokkan/Almond/Pye model of nation-building, it becomes apparent that the European integration process is based on essentially different structures and modes. It has been stressed by political scientists that the European Union possesses all the characteristics of a democratic political system (set of institutions, influence of interest groups, impact of political decisions on the distribution of economic resources, continuous feedback – Hix, 1999: 2), but that it has neither developed into a state-like organism nor remained at a confederate stage of organisation.

The structure of the member states in 1951 allowed the ECSC to integrate on the basis of a functional rather than a federal principle. Consequently, issues of state-building were only partially necessary to establish a bureaucratic structure, task coordination (penetration), and a set of legal rules (integration). Having left out the stages of identity and legitimacy-building, according to the modified Rokkan/Almond/Pye model, the European Communities focused on redistribution (institution building, social policies, support for poor regions), rather than penetration. Applying the stages of nation-building to the European integration process (as shown in Table 1) generates a different picture:

In this model, the problem of penetration and incorporation of the masses results from the inability of the Union to govern national publics. Hence, the penetration phase is divided into three parts, depending on the transfer of political power from the member states to the supranational level. In the beginning phase, the functional community-building stage replaces the state-building process, followed by system consolidation in selected fields (regional policy). The failure of the European Union to autonomously control interpersonal redistribution policies in Europe divides the distribution phase in at least two parts: the first one would be the legal-political foundation of the EU on a constitutional treaty and the second the extension of the EU policy regime towards ‘high politics’. In short, the EU does not fulfill the functions of the modern welfare state, as Scharpf (1997) analysed; the formation of an EU welfare state, even hypothetically, can therefore only be expected to happen in a slow and incremental manner.

In the model outlined in Table 2, early efforts to enhance legitimacy precede further stages of sovereignty transfer and eventually identity formation, based on the assumption that a supra-national government would hold powerful identity creation tools. Turning the causality of ‘identity creates legitimacy’ (as in the
national experience) to ‘legitimacy creates identity’ (in the context of European integration) has major theoretical implications as it requires a modified concept of popular legitimation. The academic debate has produced many valuable writings on this theoretical question, which shall, therefore, not be pursued in this paper.  

Table 2: Model of Community-building (based on Rokkan/Almond/Pye, 1979)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Crisis, Challenge, Problem</th>
<th>Institutional solution, examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community-building</strong></td>
<td>Penetration I</td>
<td>Establishment of a rational bureaucracy, coordinated tasks and decision-making procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>Establishment of rules (EC law)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distribution I</td>
<td>Establishment of institutions to promote financial balancing between prosperous and poor regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Extension of franchise, protection of minority rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legitimacy</td>
<td>Efforts to create loyalty and trust among the citizens in political institutions; efforts to secure obedience to the law; institutionalised rites and symbols (myths, flags, anthems etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consolidation of System</strong></td>
<td>Integration II</td>
<td>Implementation of a Constitutional Treaty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Penetration II</td>
<td>Development of infrastructure, defence, crisis management; mobilisation of resources (taxes, work force)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Suprastate-building</strong></td>
<td>Penetration III</td>
<td>Establishment of a supranational government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integration III</td>
<td>Implementation of a Constitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distribution II</td>
<td>Establishment of institutions to promote social security and income adjustment through progressive taxation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Establishment of media systems and institutions in order to socialise the citizens: schools, information and communication systems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ‘multiple identity problem’ of the European integration process suggests that important prerequisites for collective identity formation at the European supranational level are not fulfilled. The lack of substantial change in power relations or socio-economic conditions and the absence of an explicit popular desire to belong to a new political entity are significant obstacles to the formation of a European identity. Additionally, as the stages of community-building do not correspond with the stages of nation-building, there is no reason to assume a similar effect with regards to identity construction. To elaborate on this claim, exploring the feasibility of EU identity politics, the analysis shifts from the polity to the policy level.

The impossibility of EU identity politics

Since the 1980s, influenced by the Tindemans Report (1976) and the Adonnino Committee Report of 1984 (European Council, 1984), the EU has endeavoured to enhance popular commitment to the integration process. At first sight, the chosen measures appear similar to national identity politics. So, the question arises: Does the EU pursue its own identity politics? Have the European Commission, the European Parliament and (more indirectly), the European Court of Justice – as the EU’s supranational actors – sought to foster a European identity, as Eriksen and Fossum (2000) suggest? Do we witness, in parallel with the Europeanisation of politics, a Europeanisation of people(s)?

Indeed, we find indicators to support this view. In the first instance, EU symbolism (flag, anthem, passport, money, institutions, celebrations, number plates etc.) openly competes with the symbolisms of the member states. Although often concealed, European collective identity is declared in many official documents as a priority aim of EU policies, in particular with regard to education, youth, media policy, and, lately, European monetary policy. Even attempts to create historical myths about a common European heritage can be found: Christianity, enlightenment and modern statehood are used to declare a homogeneous ground for ‘Europeanism’ (Højelid, 2001). Although some of these ‘consciousness-raising’ campaigns (Shore and Black, 1994: 286), such as establishing European sport teams and EU stamps, clearly failed, identity-formation can be conceived as an integral part of EU politics. But can these measures be identified as a coherent EU identity policy?

Firstly, there is no evidence of common political will to factually homogenise the European peoples, to create a cultural and political supra-nationalism. Although some pro-integrationist and pro-federalist governments (as in Luxembourg and
Germany) generally support the idea of supranational identity formation, economic-functionalist oriented members such as the United Kingdom and Denmark strongly oppose it. Typically, a reference to ‘European identity’ was resentfully rejected by the British delegation during the Maastricht negotiations. The Maastricht Treaty carries a reference to ‘reinforce the European identity’ (Preamble) whilst at the same time emphasising the ‘Union’s respect for the national identities’ (Art. F [1] TEU). The increasing sensitivity of the issue is finally unmistakably expressed in the preamble of the draft treaty on a constitution for Europe, stressing the fact that the European people will remain ‘proud of their own national identities and history’, which displays an even stronger reference to the nation. Secondly, despite the White Paper’s (2001) declaration on integration of the people, the EU treaties do not involve any political provisions or powers for (supranational) identity-forming redistribution. What is missing is a clear political mandate by the member states that refuse to cede political power in the sensitive areas of culture, media and education. To create a genuinely new frame for identification, the EU would need to have considerable control over at least the instruments of policy formation and implementation in these areas.

Smith’s observation (1992: 72), that teaching is ‘determined by national, not European, priorities’ and that ‘the bulk of such [schoolroom] texts are national in content and intent’ is supported by later research. A survey by the DG Research of the European Parliament about the ‘European Dimension in Secondary Education in Europe’ found the implementation of a European dimension in education ‘often insufficient’ (European Parliament, 2003: 56), due to a general ‘lack of coordination, inadequate teacher training and certain barriers’ (ibid: iii). The ‘certain barriers’ was a clear reference to a political and administrative unwillingness in some member-states, such as Britain. As long as the member states are the principal actors in the European integration process, and as long they control and constitute the European Union, they will retain the monopoly on identity politics.

For the time being, the power centralisation on member state level makes supranational identity construction impossible. The Union, understood not as an antithesis to the state but as a functional and institutionalised extension of national interests (Milward, 2000), has to acknowledge the ‘limits of community-building’ (Lijphart, 1977; Gephart, 1993) and identity-building (MacClancy, 2000). In terms of public awareness and participation, the national state remains the intermediary governing body between the citizens and the EU. Interaction occurs predominantly between the publics and state governments, then between the EU and state governments. To date, the governing elites of the member states have largely resisted political spill-over processes from the European market towards polity building.
Evaluation: European integration and path-dependency

Path-dependency as concept refers, as Pierson (2000: 252) explains, in a broader sense ‘to the causal relevance of preceding stages in a temporal sequence’. Path-dependency in EU studies is bound to the historical-institutionalist approach which states that EU institutions matter in policy-making, depending on various conditions and resources like leadership and information (Bulmer, 1994; Pierson, 1996; Armstrong and Bulmer, 1998; Beach, 2005). The understanding of path-dependency in the current analysis refers to the modified Rokkanian model of community building (presented above), implying that the European Commission has launched actions for identity creation based on national state-building blueprints.

From a supranational-federalist perspective, the lack of power to introduce effective EU identity politics must be perceived as an instrumental gap. The strongly advocated path of institutionalism and constitutionalism is aimed to secure the stability and longevity of a governmental system, by, following Lijphart (1979), ‘ensuring social stability and enshrining an equitable balance of power, on the expense of explaining the logics and political consequences’ of the project. It is this very weakness of the federalist approach towards supranational integration that it strives for a European superstate without having the consent of either the member states, or the European peoples. The European Union represents a system that people find difficult to identify with and that struggles to create affective commitment. The EU is not comparable with other institutions or organisations and that is what irritates many citizens in Europe. The European integration process has a short past and only begins to provide enough historical material for its own historiography and mythology. And as it does not offer any comprehensible concept about its finality, it does not provide any concrete visions for orientation. Public reservation naturally results from the complexity of the political system and its unusually rapid political dynamic, which does not correspond to the stabilising and stable nature of political collective identities. Subsequently, for the majority of European citizens the EU symbolises functional integration, such as ‘freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU’ (52% support) and the common currency (37% support) more than a guarantor for idealistic or historical values: ‘democracy’ (24% support) or ‘cultural diversity’ (29% support) (Eurobarometer 63, spring 2005: 106).

In the past, in order to demonstrate its uniqueness as a political system, the European Union avoided imitating or pretending state-building. But as it appears, the opposite is taking place in recent time. Until the 1990s, the Community had developed its own and individual set of expressions, such as ‘comitology’, ‘subsidiarity’ and the ‘High Representative for Common Foreign and Security
Policy’. These were deliberately chosen to avoid similarities to national political terminology. With the launch of the European Convention in 1999, however, officials in the European Commission, in line with pro-integrationist politicians, started to promote expressions that unavoidably competed with national symbolism. With the introduction of an ‘EU president’ and an ‘EU foreign minister’ into the ‘EU constitution’ the European Union unnecessarily risked being mistaken for a path-dependent state-building process. The failure of the ‘European Constitution’ in 2005 is also the result of public rejection of the EU’s superstate terminology. Changing the name of the legal document into ‘Reform Treaty’ (signed 13 December 2007) and dropping references to EU symbolism clearly takes account of these sensibilities.

Anyway, EU symbolism, as Dunkerly (2002) argues, has never achieved a sustaining effect and probably will not. This is mainly due to the domination of the member states which establish, and continuously re-establish, their framework of legitimacy, democracy and nationality through their own identity politics. These observations have implications for the European integration process in general. Regarding European identity as the ‘missing link’ between EU politics and full political (input and output) legitimacy purports applying a state-oriented model of integration. Collective identity construction is per se a closed and backward oriented concept with its strongest roots in the nation-building processes of the 19th century, where popular legitimacy and identity-formation were irreversibly linked. But the application of a state-oriented perspective largely disregards the historical conditionality of collective identity creation and the social complexity of such processes, as Wendt was able to demonstrate (1999). For the European integration process, such a uni-directional trajectory implies the loss of alternatives which are necessary in cases of international crisis, political deadlock, or system failure. Those alternatives allowed, for example, for the ‘freezing’ of political integration in the 1970s, the re-launch with the Single European Act and doubling the number of member states after the Cold War. One of the successful elements of the integration design was and has been sufficient systemic flexibility, which allowed for a constant assessment of successive deepening and widening. In its functional approach, the European Community has had to create new methods of governance in the shape of functional regimes and flexible sub-systems.

From a strictly theoretical viewpoint, collective European identity construction must lead into a ‘state-formation trap’, which, at critical points, cannot allow for political measures that secure the integration project. These could imply the requirement of different speeds of integration, sub-group formation, or even the necessity to exclude members from the project. Additionally, as we have already seen, European identity issues seriously disrupt further integration as illustrated by the example of Turkey’s application for membership (Neumann, 1999). If the EU
member states want to prevent an unwanted debate about their ‘non-European’ minorities, they have to carefully assess the conditions and measures of future identity politics with its salient implications for issues of inclusion and exclusion (Delanty, 1995). Consequently, having once defined the parameters of ‘European identity’, be it culturally, historically or religious, the EU finds itself in an ‘identity trap’, in which the flexibility of the deepening-and-widening method is irreversibly constrained. Consequently, a European collective identity (regardless of its feasibility and political desirability) should only be considered a possible result of a successful integration, not a prerequisite.

Conclusion
Dividing both – national and European – integration processes into their evolutionary sequences, as Rokkan proposed, reveals their different trajectories in terms of community building: Whereas the nation-state promoted collectiveness for its very existence (e.g. to achieve authority, solidarity, legitimacy and defence) the European Union builds up on exactly these manifested structures without neither aspirations nor powers to replace the current system. European integration has to be regarded as a *prima facie* interstate coordination process, opposed to state-building, which is largely an intrastate process.

The general impression, that European identity construction forms a necessary part of the integration process in the near future obviously stems directly from the historical experience of nation-state building. But the EU represents the first regional integration process in political history, in which the role of identity formation remains unclear and its possible impact highly ambiguous. At least two essential prerequisites for political identity formation are not fulfilled in the EU: first, an identity vacuum that would increase popular preparedness to accept new identity patterns; and, secondly, a political authority which controls the political instruments of identity formation.

Even as a political vision, the concept of European identity has its limits – not only geographically, normatively, or socially. In the first instance, there are practical political reasons, as to why a model of supranational identity-building must fail: a lack of political will of national elites and the dominance of national *demoi*. The comparison with nation-state building processes has revealed that it would be wrong to label the European integration process as ‘supranational’. As it still engages at building a geographical space, an institutional setting and a legal basis it has not reached yet a level of creating a European collectivity. The European Union, as it presents itself since 1993, fulfils the criterion of a supra-state and supra-
governmental structure with a complex dynamic nature that does not, due to its process character, allow the definition of a precise end-stage (a European people) which would be an essential part of political identity construction. Accordingly, the solution to the European identity question is neither imminent nor immanent. For the European Union is only at the beginning of becoming a political union; collective European identity formation is then a matter of Europe’s future rather than its past.

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Notes