Towards a European Identity?

Elisabeth Bakke

http://folk.uio.no/stveb1/

Printed as Arena Working Paper No. 10/1995
Towards a European Identity?

BY ELISABETH BAKKE

The perfect European should be...

Humorous as a German, generous as a Dutchman, discreet as a Dane, famous as a Luxembourg, technical as a Portuguese, humble as a Spaniard, cooking like a Brit, available as a Belgian, controlled as an Italian, driving like the French, organised as a Greek, sober as the Irish.

EU (funny) post card, 1993.

By the middle of the 18th century the idea of national character was widely accepted in Europe. The implication was that people who belonged to a certain nation shared certain features and ways of behaving. Today the notion of national character is rather outdated, at least from a scientific point of view – which doesn't stop people from believing in it. Within our own group, we acknowledge a great variety in behavior as well as in looks, while our views of others tend to be rather stereotyped. The EU postcard makes fun of these stereotypes. Stereotypes are also an important part of our self definition, and hence of our identities; what we are, is defined in contrast to the important others, or more precisely – our stereotypes of the others.

The lack of a European stereotype suggests that the objective foundations for a European identity still need to be defined. Apart from the geographic association, (which is also diffuse), it is not clear what unites Europeans, setting them apart from non-Europeans. Nevertheless, more than half of the people in the member states of the European Community (53 per cent) claimed to feel a sense of European identity “sometimes” or “often”, according to an opinion poll carried out by Eurobarometer in 1991. This figure was somewhat lower in 1992, when a slight majority of 51 per cent claimed that they “never” felt as Europeans. This indicates that a subjective European identity exists in significant groups within the Union.

However, an other opinion poll from 1990, where the respondents were asked for their feeling of attachment to their town/village, their region, their country, the EC and Europe as a whole, indicates that people's identities are still primarily tied to local, regional and national levels. 53 percent felt very attached to their country and respectively 54 and 55 percent felt very attached to their town/village and region, whereas only 12 percent felt very attached to the EC and to Europe as a whole. It should be noted that the percentage that felt fairly attached and

---

1 A.D. Smith 1991:85-86.
2 A people’s Europe (EC booklet) 1992:1. The term EC or European Community is used when referring to the Union before the change of names in 1993.
3 Figures reported by Karlheinz Reif in García 1993:142.
4 Figures reported by Karlheinz Reif in García 1993:139.
very attached were practically the same for the EC and Europe as a whole, indicating that to the extent people have a subjective European identity, it is not tied specifically to the European Union. It seems that the Union so far has failed to capture the imagination of ordinary people.

The topic of this paper is whether a more clearly defined European identity is likely to develop in the course of the integration process. It is often (albeit implicitly) assumed that it eventually will have to, just like it is assumed that integration automatically dampens national conflicts. I consider both assumptions as ill advised. Rather than assuming, we should ask under what conditions integration may be successful in shaping (or strengthening) a European identity. In other words: What factors might enhance the evolution of a European identity that is strong enough to compete with national and regional identities, and what factors might impede it? And not least: What can the European union do to further such an identity?§

Strengthening a European identity would in turn mean two things: First, that the objective foundations of such an identity would have to be clearer, and secondly, that a subjective European identity more or less would have to permeate the entire population. Theories of nations and nationalism are well suited to illuminate these questions for two reasons. They can give us some idea of what the integrative factors are, because they try to explain why certain human groups become nations. At the same time they can shed light on the barriers to integration, because they present causes for the rise of nationalist movements, who more often than not originated in opposition to integration attempts on part of the government.

Why a European identity would be desirable from an integrationist point of view should be fairly obvious: If the integration is to succeed, a certain consensus is required, not only at elite level, but also among ordinary people, in view of the fact that the integration is voluntary in character. The people of Europe must identify with the European Union, and the decisions it is making must command a minimum of legitimacy and respect. A sense of European solidarity becomes even more vital if the integration is to proceed past the political and economic union envisaged in the Maastricht treaty, towards a “United states of Europe”. This need is openly admitted. In the words of Jacques Delors, former president of the Commission:

“Each of us must contribute to the building of Europe. Each of us must feel involved. The task includes the shaping of a people's Europe ... and, of course, broadening support for our shared venture if we are to create an open and effective community.” §

The subsequent discussion will proceed along the following lines. First, I will address the meaning of identity, especially the notion of a national identity. Secondly, a few theoretical approaches to the formation of identities are presented. Finally, I discuss the question whether a clearly defined European identity is likely to develop, also taking into consideration the problems emanating from the ensuing enlargement process.

§ The actual policies of the European Union will only be touched on for illustration purposes, as the focus here is not what the European Union has done so far to further a European identity, or whether this is presently the aim of the European Union. The latter question is far from non-controversial.

1. The meaning of (national) identity

Identities are, on the one hand, subjectively held - they exist in our minds as ideas of who we are and with whom we belong. On the other hand, identities are objectively based, in the sense that there are always “membership criteria” that determine who belongs to certain groups (and who doesn't), independently of subjective attachments. It is these uniting features, the membership criteria that enable the members of a community to recognize each other as belonging to the same community, and by the same token recognize non-member as not belonging.

What happens during a nation forming process is twofold: In the first place, a nation-forming elite formulates what it means to be a member of the nation, by defining the features that the nation-to-be (at least allegedly) share. Secondly, national formation is about spreading this new national identity (the awareness of sharing certain features, and the solidarity that follows from it) from the elite to all layers of the population of a nation-to-be.

The defining features may be certain historical traditions, a language, a religion, certain habits and customs, even physical features, or most often: a combination of two or more of these. The elite can't choose just any feature during a concrete nation forming process. Quite on the contrary, the scope of choice is clearly limited by the “objectively existing realities”, the features that the nation-to-be actually share. Sometimes the job of the elite is easy; there are many features that can be used as an anchor of national identity. Sometimes it is more difficult; the uniting features must be refined in order to serve this purpose, if not outright invented.

Identity is not only about what we have in common, it is also about what separates us from the others. National identities were formed in opposition to other national identities, with the possible exception of the English. People defined themselves as Norwegians in opposition to Danes (and later Swedes), as Germans in opposition to Frenchmen, and as Czechs in opposition to Germans. Often, the features that were ascribed to the “enemy” were outright negations of the alleged virtues of the we-group. Jan Kollár, a central figure in the Slovak “national awakening”, described the Slavs as mild, pious, good-natured, hospitable and merry, whereas the Germans (or the Teutons) were aggressive, cruel, stern and harsh. In his first Cestopis (travel story, Pest 1843), he asks rhetorically:

Which is the more meritorious contribution to humanity: fighting, shedding blood, enslaveing, oppressing, death and destruction, the German way? Or: peace and hard work, farming and trade, the home and hospitality, freedom and life, the Slav way?7

Generally speaking, there were two successful paths to nationhood. Civic nations were formed (in Western Europe), where culturally heterogeneous populations were welded together, first around certain institutions and practices, later also through cultural standardization. Cultural nations were formed (in Eastern Europe), out of communities that were culturally fairly homogeneous from the outset. In the former case, the nation was a more or less unplanned side effect of the centralizing and bureaucratizing efforts of the modern

---

state. In the latter case, a nationalist movement created, or in their own eyes, reawakened the
nation. They became nations in spite of somebody: Some members of the nation-to-be tried to
convince people that of being a group that should stick together – against the “others”.

Grossly simplified, we might say that in the civic nations, the idea of belonging together came
first, and the cultural contents were given later, whereas in the cultural nations, the cultural
contents of identity existed before people were being made aware of sharing them. In both
cases, the resulting identity involves both a feeling of belonging together, and certain shared
cultural features, however diffuse. The aforementioned opinion polls suggest that a subjective
European identity presently exists at least in some groups, whereas the objective cultural
foundations are not very well defined.

It should be noted that no national identity is formed once and for all. For one thing, the
defining contents of national identity often change with the inclusion of new groups in the
national community. Sometimes the contents of national identity change also after the nation
is fully formed, i.e. after the awareness of being a separate nation encompass all, either
because of some crises or also as a result of conscious cultivation. (National identities can to
some extent be cultivated in order to fit a new reality, but probably not in any direction).

When conflicting views of what it means to be a nation exist side by side within the same
nation (or nation-to-be) in the course of national formation or afterwards, there is a struggle
between different national ideologies. A European ideology will have to compete with the
existing national ideologies - and “win more souls”, in order to replace them.

Before starting on the discussion we should bear two things in mind. One is that also national
identities were new once. They superseded other, more local identities as the primary focus.
There is thus in principle no reason why that couldn't happen again - at a European level.
Secondly, we should remember that we all have multiple identities, varying in strength,
durability and complexity. The fact that we acquire a new identity doesn't necessarily mean
that we shed any old ones. A European identity may thus provide an extra identity layer rather
than replace national or local identities.

2. Theories on nations and nationalism
The theories of four scholars of nationalism are presented as a point of departure for the
discussion. According to Ernest Gellner, industrial society required the formation of nations.
Benedict Anderson focuses on images and communication networks. Eric Hobsbawm sees the
nation in terms of invented traditions. Finally, Anthony D. Smith emphasizes the role of pre-
existing ethnie in the formation of national identity.

---

8 The relevant literature is: Benedict Anderson: Imagined communities (1991), Ernest Gellner: Nations and Nationalism
(1983), Eric Hobsbawm: Nations and nationalism since 1780 (1992), Eric Hobsbawm/Terence Ranger: The invention of
2.1. Ernest Gellner: Culture replaces structure

Ernest Gellner's main focus is on culture, unlike most of the earlier modernization theories. His main argument concerns the growth of nations. Nations are products of industrial society; they appear in the transition from agrarian to industrial society. An agrarian society is stable, hierarchical and not very mobile. People have the same jobs all their lives, vocational skills are mostly transmitted from father to son and from mother to daughter, the literate strata are small and clearly separated from the peasant masses, education outside the household is for the few. Consequently, loyalties, conflicts and horizons are local; a shared, codified culture is not necessary. A state is an option, but not a necessity.

In an industrial society all this changes. A mobile society, in which people change jobs during their lifetime as well as from one generation to next, where the divide between elite and ordinary people is obscure, where most people are specialists and working operations requires cooperation, the ability of context free communication is a must, and so is a standardized written code, literacy and compulsory education outside the household for all. Mobile society requires a shared, codified culture.

In this society, your worth is not tied to what you are, but to what you know and what you do (merit). As competence and participation is limited by the “high culture” within which you were trained, your skills are valid only in the area in which the codified culture is valid. This is the new, expanded horizon of industrial man. It replaces the local loyalties, which are dissolved by an increasingly mobile society. Culture replaces structure as the foundation for identity, and a new, national identity is born. As the modern state is the only entity large enough to sustain the necessary system for transmitting this high culture, a state is not an option, but a necessity, and the nation-state becomes the norm.

As for nationalism, this is a reaction to the cultural standardizing efforts of industrial society by groups who are not able to assimilate because of entropy resistant features, or who are politically and/or economically deprived, while at the same time being sufficiently culturally different from their oppressors to be able to identify them as separate groups. As equality is a main value in industrial society, inequality becomes intolerable. The clue to the argument is that the modernization process is uneven, leading to increasing levels of inequality and conflict, as some groups benefit from industrialization, others not. In industrial society the new mobility makes differences in culture visible, and if those that benefit are culturally different from the others, nationalist movements emerge.

2.2. Benedict Anderson: Imagined communities

In his book *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson conceives print capitalism as material for the growth of national identity. At the outset, the market of print capitalism was a broad, but thin layer of Latin readers. Gradually, print capitalism turned to the great potential

---

9 These are features that cannot be erased, like blue skin color (Gellner's own example). See Gellner 1983:61 pp.
markets – the masses, that could only be reached through local, vernacular languages. Three parallel developments were important in facilitating the expansion of print capitalism. In the first place, Latin developed in an aesthetic direction, making access harder. Secondly, the Reformation reduced the position of Latin as a Holy language, as Luther's bible was written in a vernacular language (German). The third development was the slow and geographically irregular diffusion of vernacular written languages as languages of administration in the new centralized, bureaucratic states. (French replaced Latin in France from 1539).

Print capitalism shaped a common sphere of communication exchange under Latin and over the local dialects, leading to imagined communities of readers with access to the same newspapers, books and journals. Print capitalism froze the vernacular languages, codified them and made them look continuous and stable. At the same time it created power languages, as some dialects were closer to the written languages than others. These dialects became the languages of the elite. A common language was important for the creation of the first nations, but once the model existed, it could be copied, and imagined communities became possible without a common language. In Latin-America, the Atlantic marked the borders of the imagined communities, in Europe language borders had the same effect.

2.3. Eric Hobsbawm: The invention of tradition

The emphasis of Eric Hobsbawm is on how nationalist movements make use of existing social conflicts in order to further their aims, and how nationalist movements and political elites create or invent nations by inventing the traditions that are allegedly shared by the nation. The social and political conditions that in Hobsbawm's scheme allow the nationalist movements to invent nations are tied to economic and political modernization. The significant social conditions are twofold, on the one hand the resistance on part of traditional groups as they come under pressure from the modernization forces, on the other hand the rise of new groups without local ties as a consequence of migration processes, causing new mixtures of people with different culture within the same area. This created tensions that could be used by the nationalists to mobilize people behind their cause.

The significant political conditions are also twofold. In the first place, the expansion of the modern state led to a larger administration and expansion of education, which presupposed the choice of a language of administration and education other than Latin. In a situation when somebody's vernacular language became the official language, others became disadvantaged. This was mainly a problem for the middle class, according to Hobsbawm, because the great mass of people were illiterate and the nobility was cosmopolitan and bi- or trilingual anyway. Linguistic nationalism was the arena of people with low, but sufficient education to have white-collar jobs. “The battle-lines of linguistic nationalism were manned by provincial journalists, schoolteachers, and aspiring subaltern officials”, according to Hobsbawm.10

Secondly, there is the democratization of politics. Participation in the political life was extended to an increasing number of new groups in the period following the French revolution, even if manhood suffrage was not introduced until the late 19th or early 20th century most places. Hobsbawm's main point is that social and national demands went hand in hand. The struggle for national emancipation becomes a struggle for better social conditions as the nationalist movement enters the mass phase. This combination of social and national demands was necessary for the nationalist movements to succeed, as the national cause itself (language etc.) had limited appeal outside the middle class.

Hobsbawm considers cultural features to be less important than political and economic factors in shaping nations and nationalism. While conceding that “proto-nationalism, where it existed, made the task of nationalism easier, insofar as existing symbols and sentiments of proto-national community could be mobilized behind a modern cause or a modern state”, he argues that it was in no way “enough to form nationalities, nations, let alone states”. He argues that nations are “invented”, in the sense that they are based on invented traditions, like flags, national anthems, rituals, festivals.

2.4. Anthony D. Smith: The ethnic origins of nations
Anthony D. Smith stresses the importance of pre-national roots in explaining why nationalist movements succeeded in mobilizing people behind their national cause. Smith distinguishes between two types of pre-modern entities; ethnic categories, which have, if any, only a dim consciousness of being a separate collective, and ethnic communities or ethnie, which do have such a consciousness, at least at elite level. It is the latter (ethnie) that are most easily turned into nations. Ethnie are formed through the amalgamation of separate units and the splitting up of units, because of schisms or migration. Ethnie form cores on which modern European nations are built, but not every ethnie was turned into a nation.

Central in Smith's scheme is the idea of a myth-symbol complex that is shaped and sustained chiefly by state formation, war and organized religion. The myth-complex includes the founding charter, the myth of the golden age, and memories associated with a territory that is "ours".

His analysis of the nation forming process is based on a distinction between two (ideal) types, lateral and vertical ethnies. Lateral ethnies were composed of aristocrats and higher clergy, (from time to time including bureaucrats, high military officers and the richer merchants). They were socially confined to the upper strata, geographical dispersed, and often had close

---

11 Ibid:77.
12 He elaborates on this in chapter 1 and 7 in Hobsbawm/Ranger (1993).
13 The main attributes of ethnie are: 1) a collective proper name, 2) a myth of common ancestry, 3) shared historical memories, 4) one or more differentiating elements of common culture, 5) an association with a specific homeland and 6) a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population. See A.D. Smith National Identity (1991), chapter 2.
links to neighboring lateral ethnies. They typically had “ragged” borders and lacked social depth.

*Vertical ethnies* were more compact and popular. Their culture tended to be diffused to most social strata and classes. Social divisions were not underpinned by cultural differences, rather, a distinctive historical culture helped to unite different classes around a common heritage and common traditions, especially in times of war. Many of the vertical ethnies were religiously based. Combinations are possible, and ethnie may change, from vertical to lateral, and back.\(^\text{14}\)

The *lateral* route to nationhood is the route of England, France, Spain, Sweden, and to some extent Poland and Russia. The dominant lateral ethnies, which formed the ethnic core of the states, were gradually able to incorporate middle strata and outlying regions into the dominant ethnic culture. The primary force in such incorporation was the new, bureaucratic state, which transmitted the values, myths, traditions and memories of the dominant aristocratic ethnic core to new groups, resulting in a new and broader cultural identity for the population. Ultimately, nations were the outcome of a vigorous program of political socialization through the public mass education system.

The other route to nationhood is based on *vertical* ethnies, usually subject communities, where the bureaucratic state only had indirect influence on the formation of nations. This is the “nationalist” route to nationhood, and the main part was played by intellectual elites, who created the nation by way of vernacular mobilization in a response to modernization. Nationalist movements were movements from below. National mobilization more often than not had the character of protest against the ancient regime: It tended to be a quest for political and economic rights, as well as for cultural rights - a quest for a homeland, for economic, civic, and social rights and for education and administration in the vernacular language.

### 2.5. Conclusion

Let us summarize the factors that seem to be vital for the formation of national identities - and presumably for the strengthening of a European identity. A rather trivial conclusion is that Europeans must have something in common apart from living in Europe. In Gellner's scheme, a shared high culture and increased cross-border mobility would be helpful in making one “nation” out of the Europeans. Anderson's emphasis is on communication networks. Going along with A.D. Smith means to focus on the ethnic or historical foundations of a European identity. And finally, drawing on Hobsbawm, we would concentrate on whether the means of inventing European traditions are available. The problem of a shared language will be treated separately, since it is generally considered vital for the formation of national identity.

Barriers against the formation of an all-encompassing European identity will to some extent be negations of factors that enhance it; lack of a shared high culture, lack of communication networks or inadequate use of them, lack of ethnic and historical foundations, lack of means

to invent traditions. However, generally, we can say that European identity will be in trouble if economic and political differences continue to coincide with cultural divides.

3. Towards a European identity?
Fostering a European identity means two things - on the one hand to make the peoples of Europe feel like Europeans, and on the other hand to “construct” or define the objective foundation for such an identity. Our theories should be able to tell us something of the conditions for both. A distinction needs to be made here between the European elite and the population at large. Defining or inventing the objective foundations for an identity will most certainly be an elite project, on European level like it was in the national cases. The elite will probably also be a vital force in promoting a European subjective identity, as the elite tend to be the vanguard in nation forming processes, one way or the other. But it is also more than likely that opposition to the efforts of forming a European “nation” will be coming from local or national elites. Different elites will be the defenders of European and national ideologies, and they will be contenders in the struggle to win more “souls” among the population.

The following discussion will be organized mainly according to the aforementioned theories, which two major exceptions. I have singled out language for separate treatment. This will be treated first. The other exception is the enlargement process, which will be discussed briefly in the end. Before we start the discussion, however, we need to address a problem that has already been indicated: What Europe? Who and what is included in the concept?

3.1. What Europe?
Europe used to be coextensive with Western Christendom, i.e. excluding the Balkans as well as most of the former Soviet Union, while today it is a much wider concept, at least geographically speaking, extending to the Urals and the Bosporus. On the other hand, Europe came to signify a narrower area during the cold war period in terms of political and economic system. Here Europe was Western Europe, an area characterized by democracy and market economy. What Europe means today in terms of culture, is debatable.

The European Union is even narrower than the narrowest of the existing notions of Europe, and whether that will change in the future, depends on the enlargement process. Even after Austria, Finland and Sweden joined, Western Europe is not united, since Norway, Iceland and Switzerland remain outside. In a decade or two, the European Union may include some countries from the former East block, most likely the Czech republic, Hungary and Poland. But even in that case the European Union would remain narrower than any of the existing Europes.

And while too few countries in the Union may make it more difficult to build on an existing notion of Europe in defining the foundations of a European identity, the opposite is also true. An increasing number of member states will make integration harder, especially if they are very different from the original member states, in terms of economy, traditions and culture. A question is whether an increasing number of member states also automatically will slow down the building of a European identity. I will return to this later.
3.2. The problem of language

The idea that a language is the essence of nationhood goes back to the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (“Speak German, O you German!”), and was taken up by many a “national awakener” across Europe. In 1843 Svatovít Štúr wrote that:

... language is, then, the surest sign of the essence and individuality of every nation. Just like an individual human being, the nation reveals its deeper inner self through language. [...] this external form corresponds exactly with the inner self of the nation at all stages of its development, the spirit of the nation develops in and with the language in the form most appropriate to it: they are interdependent, and so one cannot exist without the other.16

That language and nationhood are interrelated is, however, neither an unusual notion among scholars of nationalism. Some argue that the Swiss cannot be a nation since they speak four different languages (- apart from the fact that they actually feel as one nation, and not as Germans, Italians and Frenchmen, which is really naughty of them!) Likewise, the Norwegians really ought to be two nations, since we happen to have two literary languages that are just as far apart as Czech and Slovak. Having said that, I should point out that of all the cultural features that nations tend to have in common, a codified literary language is the most usual.

As for “our” scholars, the language factor enters their theories in varying degree. Language plays the largest part in the theories of Gellner and Anderson. I will therefore tie my comments on language and European identity to their theories.

It is highly unlikely that one language will prevail within the European Union in the sense that it will become everybody's mother tongue. Thus, if an all-pervading European identity depends on that, it is not very conceivable in any foreseeable future. The question is what role language plays in these theories - is it language as a cultural expression of national uniqueness or is it language as a means of communication we are after? If we believe that languages form identities mainly by making us proud of what is ours, obviously, the lack of a European language is a severe obstacle to the formation of a European identity.

On the other hand, if we believe that the function of language in the nation forming process is to further communication, give us a common horizon, a common world outlook, there are ways to compensate for the lack of a shared European language. Language ceases to be a barrier to common identity and becomes a practical problem of communication. And this is indeed the role of language in the theories of Gellner and Anderson. In the Gellner case, a shared high culture expressed through a united system of education and a codified literary language is a means of context free communication, which is required by industrial society. In

15 From the poem To the Germans, cited in Kedourie: Nationalism (1993), page 53.
the Anderson case, language borders may (in the European case) or may not (in the Latin American case) function as borders for imagined communities of readers.

Let us take a look at the implications of the lack of a single European mother tongue. Obviously, if you cannot communicate in a language that both parts know, you cannot have context free communication, (which means that without foreign language abilities, you are stuck in your own home country), and the language cannot provide borders within which an imagined community of readers can develop. Equally obvious is the fact that if communication is the goal, the language of communication does not have to be the mother tongue of anyone.

The most democratic solution (unfortunately totally out of the question because of the sheer number of languages involved), would be that everyone learned everybody else's language, or alternatively, that everybody learned a language that were nobody's mother tongue - like Latin. A more likely solution would be to choose one of the major European languages as a European lingua franca - a language that everyone had to learn. The obvious candidates would be English, and to a lesser extent French and German. Speakers of “small” languages would be disadvantaged, whereas those that had their mother tongue chosen as lingua franca would be at great advantage. This might well provide a new source of (nationalist) conflict.

If the member countries were able to agree on one language, (the ability of the Union to impose its will on the member states is limited), it should be possible to make Europe more or less bilingual in a generation or two, depending on the quality of the language education, books and not least, teachers. The lingua franca would have to be made compulsory at all levels in the school system, and probably also in the central administration of the Union. A lingua franca is probably a minimum prerequisite for a European identity to form, at least in Gellner's scheme.

The language requirement of Anderson's theory is not as strict. For one thing, Anderson himself emphasizes that even though a common language was important in the first cases, once the nation existed as a model, it was no longer necessary. A lingua franca might not be absolutely necessary. It should be noted that among the educated European elite the language requirement is already met, if English is chosen as the language of exchange. Furthermore, the “elite” field of exchange anyway would be less excluding than Latin was, as quite a few people in the European Union have English as their mother tongue. More and more people would be included in the European community of readers and spectators, as new segments of the population achieved at least a passive knowledge of the lingua franca.

In our new world of technology, another solution is now increasingly available: Multi-language editions of newspapers and magazines, with the same text in several languages, keeping the layout as well as the pictures. This is already being done. On Television, subtitles or dubbing can make the same programs and news broadcasts available for everyone. Encouraging subtitling financially may be one way to bring European audiences closer together.
3.3. *A new European horizon?*

Apart from his emphasis on a codified high culture, a crucial part of Gellner's explanation of the new national horizon is the rapidly increased mobility in industrial society. A central prerequisite for the formation of national identity is at least formally met in the European Union; the citizens *have* the freedom to choose where to work and live. This freedom is becoming more real, as diplomas achieved in one country increasingly are accepted in other countries in the Union. “From 1991, any university degree or higher education diploma awarded in a member country after at least three years' study is now recognized in all the others under arrangements adopted at community level,” according to an EU booklet. The borders of the “nation-state” are no longer formal limits for the validity of vocational competence.

So far, there has not been a very strong tendency for people to work outside their home country. There are more immigrants from countries outside Europe, than from other EU countries in most of the member states. So far, the free movement over state borders seems to have been mainly an elite phenomenon, apart from where the same language is spoken on either side of a formal state border.

Mobility requires that any education taken in one country is be valid in all countries. Because one of the reasons for diplomas is to ensure that certain basics are known, this means that the curricula at all levels of the education systems of the member states will have to be coordinated to some extent. This is also important in relation to Gellner's theory because it is the common things we learn that make us able to communicate in a “context-free” fashion.

In other to foster a European identity, the European Union would thus have to have a say in the educational and cultural policies of the member states, which is today outside the competence of the European organs. This is clearly stated in the chapter on education in the present Treaty, where the Union, while being allowed to promote cooperation between the member states and to support certain education schemes, must do so under “full respect for the responsibility of the member states” for the contents of education as well for the structure of the educational system. All the European Union can do is hence to promote education in the languages of the member states, and support exchange programs for students and researchers.

A development of a European horizon, and hence a European identity among mobile, multi-lingual elites fluent in the most important European languages is perfectly conceivable already today. Such a multi-lingual elite already to exists among the Eurocrats of Brussels and Strasbourg, and in the great multi-national companies. And among these, a certain European consciousness may in fact be discerned.

As for the prospect of a European horizon (and identity) to encompass the great majority of (unskilled) workers, that is far less likely in the present situation, as these are more likely to

---


18 Article 126 in the Treaty on the European Communities and the European Union.
find their movement blocked by lacking language abilities, and probably more so for the older than for the younger generations. Women also tend to be less mobile, independently of language abilities, because of family responsibilities.

Many scholars of nationalism, Gellner included, have pointed out that nationalist movements are favored when cultural divisions coincide with (perceived) political and economic deprivation. The masses may actually find their identity threatened by the notion of a European identity, and combined with unemployment and economic recession, this may cause nationalist reactions. Moreover, if the small languages are excluded as working languages of the European Union, this may also lead to a nationalist reaction from the disadvantaged elites, as both Hobsbawm and Gellner point out.

**3.4. An imagined community?**

Taking Benedict Anderson's theory as our point of departure, we might rephrase our question thus: What are the chances of a European imagined community to develop? Central in Anderson's scheme is the notion of a community of readers, communicating within certain geographical boundaries, gradually leading to the formation of an imagined community. A European imagined community requires as a minimum a network of Europe-wide mass media, and possibly also sufficient (passive) language skills in the population to take part in this European imagined community.

**Newspapers**

Even if the language problem could be solved, either by way of subtitling or by making Europe bilingual, an European imagined community would require communication networks - media that can unite Europe into one community of readers and spectators. Newspapers, TV and radio stations are especially important, since they are the organs that provide the main focus of public interest and concern. The borders of an imagined community are in practice defined by the territory that is considered relevant by the agents of “print capitalism”, i.e. chiefly the journalists and the editors.

The cases that make the news either concern “us” and “our interests”, are especially dramatic - like war, hunger catastrophes, terrorism, nature disasters, or are merely curiosities (“man bites dog”). Who “we” are in this context, is defined by the scope of the newspaper, which is to some extent defined by the market of readers and advertisers. A local newspaper concentrates its efforts on the communities it covers, usually leaving a page or so for “national” and international news. A regional newspaper writes about its defined region, while a country wide newspaper will cover the entire country, but only the major cases.

---

19 Lately, new technology has expanded the possibilities of imagining communities, making geographic borders less important. People can sit in their new homes over seas and communicate with their old home country by e-mail. This leads to a new nationalism, ‘e-mail’ nationalism, as Anderson called it in a lecture at the University of Oslo in 1994.
In the present member states of the European Union, as well as everywhere else in the world, most newspapers are still local, regional or country-wide in the sense that the things that are going on “at home” are given priority, whereas everything else, including the European Union, is seen as external affairs - and accordingly described from a “national” angle.

In order for a European community of readers to develop, there would either have to be a number of European newspapers that covered the entire area, and most importantly, were read over the entire area, or the existing papers would have to change their main focus from the “national state” to the European Union. It may be difficult to re-orient the mass media towards the European Union for two related reasons.

One reason is that newspapers (and other mass media, for that matter) tend to be interested in the power holders, those that make the decisions that affect the lives of ordinary people. Budgets decisions and many other decisions that affect people’s lives are still under the control of national parliaments; hence, that is where the main focus will be. On the other hand, as the post-Maastrict European Union start to make more important decisions, we will probably see an increased emphasis on European issues. Even today, more is written about the Union within the member states than outside. However, everything that is written is not necessarily very helpful in shaping a European identity - rather on the contrary, since newspapers tend to write about conflicts rather than consensus, and to criticizes rather than praise. Moreover, since the newspapers are meant for consumption on the home market, i.e. within the borders of the “nation-state”, they tend to see themselves as the organs of people and governments at home (i.e. the “nation” or the “national interest”), rather than of Brussels. This is the other reason why such a reorientation is difficult. Decisions in Brussels that are contrary to those interests, are likely to be criticized, emphasizing the “national” against the EU.

As for European newspapers, there are presently not many of them. One of the very few exceptions is The European, an English-language weekly. It keeps editorial offices in London, Paris, Berlin, Brussels and Moscow. The focus is distinctly European, and the main emphasis is on the affairs of the European Union. But one such newspaper is hardly enough to create a European imagined community or a European “public space” of exchange, and besides, it is not commonly read. It is of course always possible for the European Union to form a number of European newspapers, with parallel issues in several languages. If people feel that the Union concerns them, they might buy and read them, if they don’t, they won’t. And the European union cannot force them.

**Broadcasting**

Broadcasting companies are maybe even more important in providing a focus of interest, and in defining the public agenda. In Europe, broadcasting used to be strictly regulated, non-commercial and public-service oriented. State owned or public controlled companies used to run channels that were geographically confined to the territory of the national state. They were used as instruments of cultural policy by the nation-states, to foster identity and promote
the national culture. Broadcasting was and partly still is the major medium for creating a public space, where communication between political institutions and citizens can take place.

There are no directly parallel examples to *The European* in the broadcasting world, apart from Eurosport, even though several channels are now accessible in many countries due to the satellite revolution. Some of the satellite channels are becoming more European in orientation, referring to decisions in the EU and such, but their main focus is still national, save news broadcasts like the BBCs EuroNews. And lacking language abilities remain a barrier for the masses, unless subtitles are made available.

The need of establishing a European public space through European oriented broadcasting has been acknowledged by the Commission:

> “Information is a decisive, perhaps the most decisive, factor in European unification. (...) European unification will only be achieved if Europeans want it. Europeans will only want it if there is such a thing as European identity. A European identity will only develop if Europeans are adequately informed. At present, information via the mass media is controlled at national level”.21

The latter is considered as a problem for the Union, but it is hard to do anything about it, as the competence in cultural questions remains at national level, whereas the Union again is supposed to “support cooperation between the member states”, while respecting the national plurality.22

A solution is, according to Jacques Delors, to “tackle the problem from an economic point of view”.23 And this is precisely what is being done. Interference is made possible by defining cultural products like books, newspapers and Television broadcasts as commercial goods in a market. As such they are subject to the Rome treaty and its provisions for free movement of goods, implying that national policies that are contrary to EU goals may be stopped.

**Competing identities**

The fact that not even *The European* is exclusively European Union in outlook,24 illustrates a general problem, that a communication network generally does not provide very clear borders for an imagined community. In the world of science, for example, the USA is more important for many Europeans than other European countries; here the imagined community is chiefly the English-speakers' and English-as-a-second-language-users' world. An increased communication exchange at European level might not lead to the desired result, because the European “public space” will not be the only one, and because the *European identity will not*...
be the only imagined community in the market. The nations are already here, and they clearly command strong allegiances. In order to replace them, the European identity must become stronger than these, and that does not presently seem likely.

A possible outcome is of course overlapping identities, where some feel more strongly European and less national than others - the winners, while those that lose on the integration revert to national identities. This way new national conflicts may arise within the Union, between European elites and more nationally minded groups that are more peripheral to the European Union, much like there are conflicts today between national elites and disaffected peripheries, but probably stronger. A European identity may exist side by side with other identities, but the prospects of replacing the national identities are in my view rather bleak.

3.5. In search of the European roots?

In Anthony D. Smith's scheme, the prospect of forming a European identity depends on the existence of an elite that “feels European”, rather than French, German or Italian, and on the existence of a sufficient foundation for such an identity in terms of shared cultural features. If both requirements can be met, the prospect of forming a European identity depends on whether the means to diffuse this identity are available to the elites. Following the lateral route, at least a core area must share a minimum of cultural features. Here the means are typically attributes of a state. Following the vertical route, elite and population must belong to the same culture. Here the means are mobilization of the people by returning to “a living past”.

The Europeans are hardly presently an ethnie, judged by Smith's criteria. They obviously do have a collective proper name, an association with a specific homeland (Europe) and maybe a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population. But a myth of common ancestry is essentially lacking and it is debatable to what extent they possess shared historical memories and common cultural features. These may have to be constructed.

An European elite?

An elite that “feels European”, more than French, German or Italian may just be under formation. Two processes are at work here; one concerns the development of a mutual sympathy and feeling of “belonging together” among the Euro-cracy, the other concerns the growth of a group with no “home country”. As for the growth of a mutual sympathy among the Eurocratic elites, this is clearly observable in places like Brussels and Strasbourg. The reason why is simple; these people have a lot in common.

The members of the Euro-cracy are young or middle aged; they have a similar educational and probably also social background in terms of social class; they work with people from other nationalities every day; they speak several languages fluently, and know quite a bit about each others culture; they do not represent their country, but the European Union; they are far away from home (except those that are natives of Brussels or Strasbourg), and do not have much family or old friends around, - so they keep company with each other. Groups of
friends are not national in composition; just like their place of work, they criss-cross national divisions.

In a multi-cultural environment like this, people start to define themselves as cosmopolitans, rather than German or Italian or Danish nationals, they may even define their identity in direct opposition to the national (and boring). They are proud of their tolerance, their open-mindedness, their cultural level and ability to communicate, and hold this up against those no-bodies at home, their narrow-mindedness, their lack of culture, their inability to speak languages and go places. Being from somewhere in particular ceases to be important; the multi-cultural environment is much more fascinating. Yet, these people still have some of their original culture intact, their Christmas traditions, their values, their food, that they also are proud of.

Then they start intermarrying, and this is the other process at work: The children of an Italian and a Dane grow up in Brussels. The Italian does not speak Danish, the Dane does not speak Italian. Their home language is French or maybe English. They do not know either of their parents' countries, cultures or languages very well, but neither do they feel very Belgian. These children may provide a truly European amalgam, freed from the particularities of national cultures, that over some generations may provide the germ of a European “nation”.25

A European elite may be seen as forming at the moment, to the extent that the children marry someone else without a home country. Some probably will, but even so, this is a slow way of spreading an identity.26 And obviously, to the extent that a European elite is forming, it will be a lateral elite. Whether such a new elite is cosmopolitan in nature, or consists of people without a home country, or both, it will certainly be different from the masses of Europe.

**A common foundation?**

Whether a sufficient foundation for a European identity exists in terms of shared cultural features, may be discussed according to a common myth of ancestry, shared historical memories and elements of common cultural features. The question is really twofold; one is whether the entire area that is called Europe, in a broad sense shares particular cultural features. The other question is whether at least a core area shares some cultural features.

A point of departure may be the different conceptions of Europe. *Geographically*, Europe stops at the Ural mountains and the Bosphorus. Within this area, a wild array of cultures, religions, political forms and economic systems coexist. *Culturally*, the boundaries of Europe extend to the doorstep of the Islamic and, in the eyes of many West Europeans, to the doorstep of the Orthodox Christian world. Yet, it is not obvious that Protestant and Catholic Christendom should be concordant with a European identity and Orthodox Christendom not. If people belonging to Orthodox Christendom and Islam should officially be “denied” the right to be

---

25 This is how America made Americans out of its immigrants. On the other hand, they may start seeking for their roots, leading to a new wave of nationalism. It has happened before.

26 Even in the case of Yugoslavia, where the peoples were culturally and linguistically more similar than most European nations, only 5,4 percent defined themselves as Yugoslavs in the 1981 census. Census referred in Lysestøl 1985:166.
Europeans, this would certainly be met by opposition. Finally, *economically and politically*, Europe encompass those countries that have both stable and functioning market economies, and stable democracies. This Europe is not quite as internally divided, but even here, a number of languages, and at least two versions of Christianity, Catholicism and Protestantism coexist.

The most striking fact of each and every one of these Europes is thus the many differences, in language, in religion, in traditions - and certainly in history. In the first place, many different mutually incomprehensible *languages* are spoken, thus obviously, language can never be a uniting feature in Europe. Secondly, as for *religion*, the division between Catholicism and Protestantism has been profound since the time of Luther in Western Europe, and the split between Orthodoxy and the Western Church goes even further back, to the 11th century.

No particular brand of Christianity can thus serve as a point of departure for a European identity, even within Western Europe. Christianity as such *can*, I suppose. European identity would then have to be defined in terms of Christian values, rituals etc. I see two problems - one; an increasing number of people in all countries are non-believers, and even among the believers, being Christian is not their most important identity; and two - being Christian is not particularly “European”. Choosing Christianity as a European focus means that the important others would have to be the Buddhists or maybe more likely, the Muslims, since they are already pictured as the enemy, but then on behalf of the entire Western world.

Thirdly, it also remains a fact that *historically*, most European peoples at one time or another have been at war with each other, no matter what Europe we choose. In Smith's scheme, this is a problem to the extent that wars against a common enemy are used by the “Myth making industry” of nations and ethnie, in order to provide a common focus, heroes, something to celebrate. In European history, a victory for one necessarily meant loss for somebody else, as most of the wars were fought out in Europe between European dynasties, states and tribes. In a European reformulating of history, all these wars would have to be redefined as internal wars, which would be no easy task.

Following Smith's scheme, it is also clearly a problem to find periods in European political history that were Golden ages for all, as periods of glory for one people are often periods of decay for others in the same area. For example, the Napoleonic time was a time of glory for France, but hardly for very many others; the reign of the Serbian czar Dusan was a time of glory for the Serbs, but not for the Albanians and Greeks, his subjects. It may be argued that this often go for the Golden ages of nations as well - in different parts of the country.

Also politically, the traditions of Europe diverge. One distinction in terms of political traditions is made between Western and Eastern Europe, based on the strength of “civil society”. According to John Breuilly, a sovereign state emerged gradually in Western Europe through a process of negotiation between monarchs and the political community within which they operated, while in Eastern Europe, the monarchs did not have to bargain to increase their power, because neither landowners nor autonomous towns were strong enough to oppose
them effectively. The resulting West European pattern was thus a liberal one, while the East European was authoritarian.

Barrington Moore points to the same difference in political traditions, but he links the authoritarian development in Eastern Europe to the lack of strong, independent cities and a strong bourgeois class, enabling the landed aristocracy to ally itself with the state bureaucracy against the interests of the weak bourgeoisie and the peasants, leading, among other things, to a “second feudalism”. No matter what the reasons are, it remains a fact that cultural as well as political traditions differ between East and West.

We may safely conclude, then, that in terms of language, religion, history, political and cultural traditions, there are not many common features to be found that would be valid for the entire area. But the lack of common features is not the only problem. The lack of common enemies is perhaps as important. Drastically speaking, what the European Union needs to bolster a European identity, is probably a nice little war against Russia. Short of that, a “trade war” or a “sports war” could conceivably function as a substitute in the myth making process.

The identity shaping effect of sports have unfortunately not been very closely scrutinized so far, and the European Union of course lacks specifically European sports teams at the moment, but that could be remedied. On the commercial arena, a trade war between the European Union and Japan or the United States could help strengthening a European identity, especially if the European public were hurt economically, either as producers or consumers.

If we return to our discussion, the “vertical” ethnic route to “nation-hood” is, not surprisingly, blocked for the elites of the European Union. What about the “lateral” route?

A European myth of common ancestry used to exist prior to the Renaissance, according to John Hale. An old Greek myth had it that a beautiful young woman, Europa, fell in love with the god Jupiter, who came to her in the shape of a white bull. He took her to Crete, where he turned into a man, made her pregnant, and the children of Europa became the founding Europeans. This myth is hardly useful today, and a modern myth may be harder to come by, as Europeans descend from many different tribes - Franks, Goths, Saxons, Avars, Celts, Slavs and many other groups that are now forgotten.

On the other hand, because of migration and conquest, various (race) mixtures occurred, and the origins of the different European peoples are thus obscure and hard to tell apart. This mixture may provide a starting point for a founding myth in line with the cosmopolitan image of the new European elite, and the related ideas about virtues and vices. It may be argued that, what “we”, the Europeans, have in common is tolerance, as opposed to the fanatic “others”.

27 García 1993:373.
28 Barrington Moore 1966.
According to an old European line of argument, it was the cross-fertilization of cultures that shaped the European civilization (which is of course partly true). A related argument is that multi-cultural entities are preferable as they tend to be more tolerant and peaceful (both of which are myths).

Originally, these were arguments in favor of Europe, against the barbarians. In a new context they may be used as an argument in favor of the European Union, against the, by definition, more “narrow-minded and intolerant nation-states”. Hélène Ahrweiler argues that communities “flourished in the atmosphere of unity created by the cultural and political tolerance which is the hallmark of multi-ethnic entities such as empires; and they lived an almost entirely peaceful existence within the confines of the Byzantine and Ottoman empires - as indeed they did later within the Austro-Hungarian Empire of Central Europe”.

The argument is of course totally history-less. For one thing, tolerance is a rather new phenomenon, and Europeans were no better than others on this account in the past. I am afraid the non-Christian subjects of the Byzantine Empire, the non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire and the non-Catholic subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire might not agree to the great tolerance of their rulers. The victims of the Catholic Counter-reformation, whether these were Flemish or Czech, probably would not subscribe to the great tolerance of the house of Habsburg. Neither would the pagan Slavs that had their heads cut off by the Byzantine emperor, subscribe to his great tolerance. The Ottoman intolerance was less drastic; they satisfied themselves by taxing their Christian subjects more severely and by taking one son away from every family in order to man their military and administration. To the extent that myths like this are believed, however, they do their job. For identity purposes it is not really important whether they are true.

Cultural traditions, language and religion are, as already mentioned, too different even within the smallest of Europes, to be a foundation for identity. At the same time, it is obvious that the European “core area”, (which most Westerners will argue consists of the present member states of the European Union and the EFTA countries), in fact does have something in common. According to Soledad García, “what characterizes the core is economic modernization, political democracy and stability, as well as a rich body of common traditions and opposing values, which (...) have been forces for constructive dialogue rather than causes of war in recent times”. What are these European values, then?

Again, in the words of García, it is “Hellenism, with the search for discipline, rationality, perfection, beauty and justice; Roman law and institutions, which created a 'model of organized and stable power; and Christianity (with elements of the Judaic tradition), which

---

30 García 1993:43.
31 García 1993:2.
has contributed so powerfully to universalization of spiritual, moral and human principles as well as deeds”. These are some of the same elements that Anthony D. Smith mentions:

These patterns of European culture, the inheritance of Roman law, Judeo-Christian ethics, Renaissance humanism and individualism, Enlightenment rationalism and science, artistic classicism and romanticism, and above all, traditions of civil rights and democracy (...) have created a common European cultural heritage and formed a unique culture straddling national boundaries and interrelating their different national cultures through common motifs and traditions (...) a cultural heritage that creates sentiments of affinity between the peoples of Europe. It is here (...) we must look for the basis of a cultural Pan-European nationalism that may paradoxically take us beyond the nation.

Before the age of nationalism, the elite culture was European and cosmopolitan more than “national”, whereas the folk cultures were local, but not totally lacking similarities. Art and architecture are maybe the most visible examples of the European horizon of the old elites. Patterns and styles from the same periods are similar all over Europe, with some individual variations. A Baroque castle in Bohemia looks more like a Baroque castle in England than a Renaissance castle in the same area, and the cross-cultural influences are clearly visible in music, sculpture and painting. This also true for the only music that was really “national” in any sense, the music of the National Romantic period. Even fairy tales are similar - the names and settings are different, but the themes and the stories are very much the same. This shared European elite culture may serve as a point of departure for a European identity building.

**Are the means available?**

Now, supposing that a European elite is actually forming, and that there exists certain shared cultural foundations for a European identity, at least in the core area, are the necessary means to foster a European identity available? The crux of the matter is that, on the one hand, the European route to “nation-hood” would have to imitate the lateral one in Smith's scheme, as the required shared cultural features in terms of language, religion and history are lacking. The shared features mentioned above approximate the civic nation, rather than the cultural nation. The “first-born” civic nations were nations-from-above, where an elite in Smith's terms spread its culture, myths and memories, though the means of a centralized and bureaucratic state. On the other hand, the European elite would have to use the means of the vertical route, as the coercive powers of the “first-born” West European models are lacking. (The European Union is a “voluntary project”, and thus have to mobilize support for its policies).

The education system, the mass media and sports are crucial in spreading a national consciousness among the people, and in preserving and reproducing it, once it exists. European sports teams or series do not exist, neither does European representation in

---


33 A.D. Smith 1991:174. He is not very optimistic that this will actually happen, though.
important international organs, and as already discussed, the mass media are national, so is
the school system.

In order to spread a European identity, the European Union, with some qualifications, would
have to use the methods of a nationalist movement, a movement from below, in order to
convince the members of the alleged “nation”, the Europeans, that they are really Europeans,
and not Germans or Italians or Danes. In order to mobilize them for the European cause, the
European “awakeners” must invent or discover a shared history by selecting the parts of
European history that suit this aim, and by idealizing the European cultural manifestations.

In order to succeed, the elite needs to be able to return to a “living past”, one people can
recognize as theirs. The question is then whether the common European heritage is strong
enough. Roman law, human rights, democracy and such may be recognized as values people
willingly adhere to. On the other hand, democracy may just not be enough to build a strong
identity on. The differences in terms of culture, traditions, mentalities and values may still be
too great. And a European elite “high” culture may not be of any help at all in incorporating
the masses. It may be argued that theater, classical music, architecture and the like are not
phenomena that the masses really care too much about anyway.

3.6. Inventing a European identity?

According to Eric Hobsbawm, ceremonies, symbols, rituals, traditions certainly can be
invented where none exist, by nationalist movements as well as by states - and of course also
by the European Union, independently of “a living past”. For example, even if most wars in
Europe were between Europeans, some wars were actually fought against external forces, and
these may be given emphasis. Examples are wars against the Mongols and the Ottoman Turks
- civilization against barbarians. The unsuccessful Ottoman sieges of Vienna in 1529 and
1683 might be used as examples of European achievements, especially since the Habsburg
empire was a multi-cultural empire united by marriage rather than conquest. Large European,
multi-national empires may be used as points of departure for European state myths - the
Holy Roman Empire is one candidate, the Habsburg Empire might be another.

The “awakeners” may also picture the internal European wars as wars between good and evil,
between the European virtues (democracy, popular sovereignty) and the vices (authoritarian-
ism, racism). Most people in Europe still see the outcome of the second world war as a loss
of the Germans, not only the Nazis. The trick is to convince the Germans and the rest of
Europe that the Nazi's were first and foremost evil, and German only by accident. The
statements around the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the D-Day indicate that a
redefinition process is starting.

Some of the means of the state are actually available, especially when it comes to inventing
symbols. Some traditions, rituals and symbols are already “invented”. The European Union's
blue flag with 12 yellow stars on was actually “stolen” from the European Council. It is now
increasingly being used along with the national flags. In Brussels, the souvenir industry does
a great job in helping them spread this symbol, producing cups, can-openers, postcards - you
name it. Beethoven's ninth symphony has been chosen as “national” anthem, the drivers licenses are standardized, and passports have the emblem of the European Union in them.

The Maastricht treaty introduced Union membership, giving citizens of other EU countries the right to vote in local elections and in elections to the European Parliament in their new country of residence. In article 128 in the same Treaty, stated aims of the European Union are; to promote better knowledge of and diffusion of the European peoples’ culture and history, to protect the European cultural inheritance, to promote non-commercial cultural exchange, to promote cultural and literary activity, also in the audio-visual area.34 A European history book, underlining the European heritage, was published in all languages in 1991.

According to Hobsbawm, a successful invention of tradition depends on the material interests of the populations involved.35 It is normally not enough for the “national awakeners” to return to a living past, one the people can identify with. The people must have a reason for adhering to the ideas and images that they are presented for. In other words, the elites of the European Union can only succeed in “winning more souls”, if they can give people something in return - a reason to support the European cause.

Economic growth and low unemployment may be such reasons. A European citizenship may be seen as an asset for those who want to work other places, since it makes it easier for people to participate. A European citizenship that implies better social rights than hitherto may be an extra asset in areas where social welfare is not very developed. Certain regions may see their interests served by a stronger European Union, hoping that their “nation-states” will loose power, etc. A European identity is thus more likely to come about if the European Union succeeds in achieving its economical aims.

3.7. Summary
Let us sum up some of the obstacles to the strengthening of a European identity, as well as some of the possibilities. In terms of defining the objective foundations for such an identity, the problem is twofold: In the first place, the extent of Europe is less than clear. Where does Europe stop? The answer depends on what time span we are talking about as well as what criteria we choose. In terms of culture, today's geographical Europe is the most diverse, while the political and economic core area (of which the European Union form only a part) is the least diverse. Secondly, even within the smallest of Europe, the cultural differences are rather large, in terms of language (several), religion (at least two) and historical traditions (various).

However, there are certain values, institutions and historical traditions that are shared by a core area. These, and the remnants of European cosmopolitan elite culture might provide a point of

34 From Article 128 in the Treaty on the European Communities and the European Union.
35 This is noted also by other scholars, among others Ernest Gellner (1983) and Miroslav Hroch (1985).
departure for an elaboration on what it means to be European as opposed to non-European. A history can always be presented in a way that underlines the things we have in common, while toning down the rest. There are many examples of this in national history writing.

In terms of diffusing a European identity, obstacles are basically that a single European language, a lingua franca is lacking, impeding the development of a united European horizon, a Europe-wide public space, a European communication network. The cross-border mobility is too low, the foreign language abilities are not good enough, especially among the uneducated and the elderly, and maybe the willingness to move to another country is also to low.

The integration process may eventually change some of this, when the internal market becomes more real. A decision to make a lingua franca compulsory in the school systems would eventually improve people's abilities to communicate cross-border, and would probably increase mobility, but not necessarily. Experiences from other multi-cultural units suggest that a majority prefers to live among their own kin. The cultural barriers against mobility might not be all that easy to erase.

A major (maybe the most serious), obstacle is that the European Union at present doesn't possess the sufficient means to build a strong European identity, because the competence in cultural and educational matters is still placed at nation-state level. This means that the Union at least to some extent will have to resort to the means of the national movement in order to diffuse a European identity.

4. Enlargement

Before this discussion comes to an end, a few comments should be made on enlargement. Enlarging the European Union generally means more traditions, more religions, more languages, a different history. This makes the formation of a European identity more difficult from most points of view, at least in the short term. A too narrow scope is of course also a problem, in the sense that any feature that can be chosen also will be shared by countries outside the Union, as the case was with the former EFTA-countries.

In Smith's perspective, an enlargement means that the myth-complex will either be thinner, or less representative for the population, and hence that the chance of returning to a living past becomes fainter. A European identity would have to be based on some cultural patterns, and these would probably be the patterns of Classic Greece, Roman law, revolutionary France and parliamentary England, rather than of Hussite Bohemia. The adoption of a European identity would thus probably be uneven, even if a consciousness was able to spread gradually. The less integrated areas might continue to be areas of (nationalist) unrest. On the other hand, as the East European countries develop economically and get a firmer democratic foundation, these areas might be incorporated gradually.

In Gellner's perspective, more countries means more people with lacking language abilities, and thus, possibly less mobility, especially as the newcomers in the East belong to a group of
languages that is not presently represented in the Union - the Slavic tongues. Furthermore, because of the communist legacy, these people learned other things in school than the average European child. They are less trained in democratic ways, Russian was often the second and only compulsory language apart from their own, not English or German. There is of course also the chance that the enlargement process might help facilitate a development in direction of a lingua franca in the European union. The Union might “have to” reduce the number of working languages in the future for simple reasons of efficiency, if the number of member states increases to the double of today's.

In the perspective of Anderson, the enlargement process may slow down the development of a European imagined community, as the new parts of the Union will be less integrated, and also less likely to join in the communication network, again, especially since the language skills in any West European language, English included, are sorely inadequate. Also, the rest of the Union might take some time to include the newcomers in the “European family”.

The “trust barometer” of the Eurobarometer might be seen as supporting this assumption; among the nine countries that first became members (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, France, Italy, Great Britain, Ireland and Denmark), a majority distrusted the newcomers (Greeks, Portuguese, Spaniards) in 1980, whereas a majority in each of the countries trusted each other, with one notable exception, the Italians, that were least trusted of all in 1980. (Could it be the Mafia connection?). The trust level generally increased in 1986 and further in 1990, and now a majority in every country trusted each of the others.37

5. Conclusion

A European identity will be easier to foster in a smaller than in a larger Europe, because the differences in traditions as well as languages will increase with the number of member states. On the other hand, is it the differences in culture, rather than the number of states that make identity more difficult. The three new members probably make little difference. Czech republic would at least lead to the inclusion of a new group of languages, and as for the rest of the East European applicants, the cultural differences are even greater.

A European identity will be easier to foster if the integration is high, than if it is low. Control of education and the mass media is material in this respect - as communicators of a myth-symbol complex and identity shaping horizons. If the European Union is better integrated, the focus of interest will be more European, as people tend to direct their interest to the level where the major decisions are made. The opposition will also become European, rather than national. On the other hand, opposition to a new European state may be articulated in nationalist terms.

More integration may also lead to conflict and eroding European identity. People may feel (their own or “the national” interests) threatened by a European Union that interfere more in

37 Reif in García 1993:138.
their lives. Some opinion polls after Maastricht may indicate this. There may also be resistance against moving decision making power from the local and national levels.

It should be kept in mind that in the “first-born” nations, where heterogeneous populations were molded into a nation, the situation was a pre-national one, where the elites did not have to fight strong existing allegiances. In the European case, a European identity will have to fight its way against strong national identities that already exist. And in a democracy, you cannot prevent others from winning souls for their (national) case, even if it is contrary to a European identity. This is the main reason why the formation of a European identity is a difficult, and most likely, a very time-consuming project, if at all possible.
References

1. Books and articles

2. Official documents issued by the European Union