

EUROPE IN SEARCH OF EUROPEANS

THE ROAD OF IDENTITY AND MYTH

G rard Bouchard

Foreword by Pascal Lamy

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FOREWORD

by Pascal Lamy

Perhaps we at the Jacques Delors Institute, which at the time was called “Notre Europe”, had realised earlier than others that the dream of the founding fathers of the 1950s would not come true, at least not as they had envisaged it. They had placed too much hope on alchemy, as if the leaden process of economic integration based on enlightened self-interest could magically be transformed into the golden promise of a political union that would give rise to a European demos.

The apocryphal quip often attributed to Monnet needs to be placed in that context. “If I had to do it again, I would begin with culture.” *Se non è vero è ben trovato!*

For until now, an essential ingredient of European integration has been missing: a symbolic and cultural dimension capable of consolidating a sense of belonging. There is, to use the simultaneously grand and technical terms employed by the social sciences, an emotional deficit that originates in a lack of fictional powers.

This insight provided the starting point for a research project begun in the early 2000s by Aziliz Gouez and continued by Gérard Bouchard and others. Bouchard presents some of the results of this work in the present study. Drawing on anthropological approaches, he sheds light on the difficult question of European identity or rather, the identity of Europeans. It is often in the border regions or “*limes*” where many influences intersect that cultural mores and habits but also the dreams and nightmares of Europeans take shape.

I entirely agree with Bouchard’s emphatic call for a myth that would rouse the imagination of Europeans, bringing together reason and emotion to rally public opinion behind the project of European unification. With some aspects

of his argument, however, I would not concur. In his description of the founding “mythology” of Europe, he overemphasises the importance of anti-national discourse. In my opinion, it was above all the anti-war story that focused minds at the time.

But the principal merit of his research is to have demonstrated just how empty the anthropological slogan “unity in diversity” is. Bouchard is at his strongest when he invites the reader to follow him on his painstaking quest for a European story - about the necessity of which he has no doubt - that does not take umbrage at discourses of national belonging but on the contrary considers these as powerful resources to be tapped into.

What we need now is a user manual that would show how to apply Bouchard’s approach to domains and values (such as dignity or equality). And what better place to start than an initiative providing Europeans with greater knowledge about the mythologies making up their constituent parts. It would mark a step towards a European identity founded on the principle of knowing, understanding and appreciating the identity of others, which seems to me the most promising way to make sense of differences. This is why the Jacques Delors Institute campaigns for the creation, in Europe and elsewhere, of chairs in European Anthropology. The work of Gérard Bouchard, like that of Stanley Hoffmann and Elie Barnavy before him, is proof that non-European perspectives on the European project are often more penetrating and lucid than our own.

Pascal Lamy
President Emeritus of the Jacques Delors Institute

SUMMARY

This study is a plea in favour of the European Union (EU). Yet, it is also critical of some choices it has made in the past, choices that now hinder its development. I seek to demonstrate that the EU needs to rebuild its symbolic foundation and to redefine its relationship with the nations (as configurations of culture, not to be confused with the states). It is assumed that any form of social link (or “polity”), however thin, must rely on some shared basic symbolic assets.

A first part recalls the founding cultural choices that have allowed the EU to take off and to enjoy a rapid development after WWII. The second part proceeds to show how the same choices can be linked to the major predicaments that are besetting the EU today. I submit that, after having efficiently propelled the EU, most of the founding choices have become somewhat counter-productive mainly because they have not been revised and adapted to the changing conjunctures.

The analysis then goes on to review the unsuccessful subsequent attempts made by the EU over the past decades to develop new myths and a European identity. As a result, the EU presently finds itself ensnared in a deadlock, in search of a symbolic platform to bolster and to further its integration process but seemingly unable to build it.

I contend that a particularly unfortunate choice made by the EU’s pioneers and their successors was to distrust and sidestep the nations as well as the people, and to opt for a top-down process of governance. In order to break this pattern, I suggest that the EU will have to find a way to mend fences with the nations in order to a) put an end to a long-standing detrimental tension, b) harness rather than stifle the nations’ still substantial symbolic resources and energy, and c) secure a platform to build new European myths.

Finally, examples of a new way to build the future myths are offered, essentially through what I call a europeanization of national myths. The goal is to carve myths that would resonate both at the continental and national levels. In other words: to fashion a true European voice with strong national echoes.

INTRODUCTION

The readers will find here¹ a very brief account of the birth and evolution of the European Union² from a cultural perspective that focuses on its symbolic foundation. There is no pretence to discredit other dimensions or approaches. Needless to say, a society is more than its values, beliefs, identities and myths, and a wide-ranging approach should make room for the major role of politics, economy, social relations and institutions in shaping the course of the EU. In a spirit of complementarity, my goal is only to show what a cultural analysis could add to the existing knowledge and understanding of the EU's past and present. More specifically, it is hoped that this contribution will shed some light on the current difficulties and challenges facing the EU, without any disregard for its remarkable achievements, specially in the economic sphere – although this statement deserves some qualification³. I certainly do not question the relevance and the merits of the EU in its attempt to protect and stimulate the development of European societies in a globalized world and to allow the continent to assert its “difference” in keeping with its past. I only wish to take a critical look at some of the cultural choices it has made since its inception and to offer some suggestions about its future, if the integration project (specially in the political sphere) must be kept alive and grow stronger, as I think it should.

1. My research has been carried out within the Canada Research Chair in collective imaginaries (which I am holding since 2002). I am grateful to the University of Québec at Chicoutimi for the generous funds it has provided. I also wish to thank Alain Roy, Jean-François Lessard and Monique Fournier for their professional assistance. Former drafts of the paper have been improved thanks to comments from Geneviève Nootens, Michel Seymour, Peter Hall and other members of the Successful Societies group of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research. Helpful comments were also offered by several audiences following presentations at various meetings and venues. Finally, special thanks are due those (including Yves Bertoncini) who have encouraged me to write this paper and to Catherine Audet for her patient technical support. However, the usual disclaimers apply.
2. From now on: EU. I will use this acronym throughout the paper even though the Union has gone through several name changes in its history.
3. In terms of GDP, the European record as a whole compared to other parts of the world is not that good. Moreover, one could always speculate about how national economies would have performed in the absence of the EU.

In the first part, I will briefly outline what I mean by the notion of symbolic foundation (focusing primarily on myths and identity). In the second part, I will return to the founding choices or options that I think have efficiently supported the birth and the development of the EU with a view to demonstrating i) how over the years these choices have become ineffective, if not detrimental, and ii) how they can be linked – and perhaps have contributed to lead – to what many analysts nowadays refer to as the crisis of the EU. In the third part, I will examine the largely unsuccessful efforts made by European leaders and intellectuals to reconfigure and to expand the increasingly inefficient symbolic foundation of the EU – mainly through attempts to craft new myths and build a European identity. I will then wonder if there is a future for European identity and myths. In the last part, I will examine the “catch 22” to which the EU is now confronted and I will suggest a possible way out of it.

The crisis that the Union has experienced over the past few years confers a particular relevance to this reflexion. Aggravated by the Greek imbroglio, the refugees crisis and the recent vote on Brexit, the present situation has provoked very dark prognoses, some analysts even predicting the end of the EU⁴.

My Study is based on the analysis of a few hundred books and articles by scholars, political actors and public intellectuals from various countries who have contributed to the debate about the origins, the evolution, the definition and the future of the EU. I have also relied on numerous pieces from newspapers and official documents published by EU instances. Needless to say, given the space limits, the references will be kept sketchy. I will also shorten major developments and sacrifice many refinements.

4. W. Laqueur, 2007; S. S. Jo, 2007, p. 162; S. Wood, W. Quaisser, 2008; E. Balibar, 2010; T. Judt, 2011; J. Prieur, 2012; F. Heisbourg, 2013; A. Mody, 2013, and others, including a piece published by the *Time* (the American magazine, 22 August 2011, p. 23-27) under the title: “The End of Europe”. And, On 19 December 2015, The *International New York Times* headline was: “Has Europe reached the breaking point?”.

1. The concept of symbolic foundation

The notion of symbolic foundation is rooted in a neo-durkheimian tradition. It echoes the importance that the French sociologist attached to the layer of shared symbols that at once a) underpin the life of any collectivity and b) emerge from it⁵. But Durkheim went as far as to assert that a collectivity ends up resembling and acting in accordance with the image that its members have built of themselves, an assertion that can be seen as a bit of a stretch. Likewise, he obviously went too far in approaching traditional societies as closed, homogeneous and coherent totalities. In contrast, I assume that symbolic foundations harbour a fair amount of heterogeneity and contradictions, and they are open to “contentious politics”⁶, while providing a ground to solve conflicts. They also lend themselves to instrumental or strategic utilisation. Moreover, Durkheim also granted a primacy to the symbolic factors, a view that I do not share.

The concept, however, remains relevant. From a modern perspective, what is involved here is a common language and a set of beliefs, values, ideals, norms, narratives and worldviews usually coalescing into myths, identity and “repertoires”⁷, conveyed and perpetuated through rituals by institutions and other social actors across social divisions. In short, the symbolic foundation is the realm of deepest meanings, emotions and sacredness (religious or not) that foster solidarity and support institutions. From one society⁸ to another, it can be more or less substantial, consistent, and forcefully inculcated. But as a rule, it stands to reason that the more closely integrated a collectivity wishes to be, the more substantial a symbolic foundation is needed for the sake of unity, cooperation, and shared future. In other words, no social link without some symbolic foundation.

Beyond Durkheim, a similar idea permeates Western anthropological and social thought. Interestingly, in *Democracy in America* (Part II), Tocqueville

5. Durkheim stressed the fact that once produced, symbols (and social representations) live a life of their own and generate new symbols (see W. Doise, 1984).
 6. D. Imig, S. Tarrow, 2001.
 7. Defined as sets of collective representations or symbols which members of a society tap into in order to make sense of their life (A. Swidler, 1986).
 8. Or collectivity, regardless of its scope (family, city, region, nation, continent...).

underscores the necessity, in all societies, of “dogmatic beliefs” that people endorse without discussion. He also points out that for a society to be successful, its members must be held together by a few “founding ideas”. Societies devoid of such a symbolic platform are more at risk of lapsing into various forms of powerlessness and stagnation, as a result of their inability to build consensus and to mobilize around common goals. All social sciences, in various ways and extents, share this assumption. For instance, a tenet of neo-liberal “creed”, as expressed years ago by the Mont Pèlerin’s pioneers, stipulated that any free society presupposes “a widely accepted moral code”⁹. An old research tradition shows that this holds for the micro-social level as well. There is a wide theoretical agreement among psychologists that any social relation needs to rely on some form of symbolic underlay.

A symbolic foundation is also a primary condition of civic life. It makes democracy, political participation, social justice, and a sense of mutual responsibility possible and it contributes to nurture the necessary minimal trust between rulers and ruled. However, it remains open to dissidence and controversy, it is always changing and it should never be taken for granted; it constantly calls for reinforcement, adjustment and redefinition.

Finally, very broadly construed, the concept could be equated with the whole sphere of culture, including customs, rites, day-to-day communication codes, fashions, tastes, material culture, etc. But thus defined, it would lose its relevance, so I will rather focus on its societal components, those which structure and drive a society: values (mythified or not), beliefs, worldviews, identities, narratives, ideologies.

Two additional, complementary concepts are needed: myth and identity.

⁹ D. Pletwe, 2009, p. 24.

1.1. Myth

Myth will be primarily defined as a sacralized value, emotionally grounded, part of a seven-fold configuration¹⁰:

1. **A linkage to the deep layer of archetypes.** One way or another, a full-fledged myth always activates primary, largely universal, an-historical images such as brotherhood (or blood ties), betrayal, golden age, apocalypse, renaissance (or rebirth), threatening Other, saviour, mother-land, and the like. Archetypes are deep powerful representations on which other representations are built. They lie at the heart of collective imaginaries.
2. **Interventions of social actors.** To a large extent, the emergence of a social myth requires the contribution of collective actors (political parties, institutions, media, lobbying groups, associations, trade unions, social movements...) who find an interest in promoting the message it conveys in order to advance their agenda. In doing so, they activate what could have been hitherto dormant archetypes.
3. **Narrative.** Myths are essentially collective representations carrying sacralized values and beliefs, but most of the times, they also feed on a vision of the past. Usually, it is rooted in a particularly significant event or experience (an “anchor”), source of a powerful emotion (an “imprint”) that is translated into values and norms (an “ethos”)¹¹. So, a myth is not a narrative but it needs it to bolster itself.
4. **Discursive strategies (including visual, iconic supports).** They aim to promote the myth by way of various rhetoric devices – framing being the most common.
5. **Sacralization.** The mythification process is driven by emotion more than by reason (which is not to mean that emotion is necessarily unreasonable). Thanks to what I call a cognitive shift (or a cognitive leap), the historized values and ideals conveyed by the message get immersed in sacredness (or

¹⁰. What follows comes from G. Bouchard (2014).

¹¹. I call “historization” the process by which a set of values are derived from an anchor/imprint and promoted through commemoration.

any form of transcendence). This is the most defining attribute of a myth which, this way, is able to largely escape criticism and to endure despite its potential contradictions, distortions and lies. National myths are the most familiar embodiment of this attribute.

6. **Symbols.** As identifiers and boosters of values and ideals, symbols are a critical part of the apparatus designed to disseminate and to support myths. Consisting of the familiar features of heroes, of glorious or traumatizing events, of storied objects, songs and sites, they provide the “grammar” of the commemorative rituals. Rituals perform a similar role.
7. **Contextualization.** The message must closely connect with the deep sources of anxiety, challenges and dreams of a population at any given time. Then, it can be seen as a way out of a predicament, as a road to fulfilment and happiness.

A myth can be just an attempt to manipulate, to alienate minds. More generally, it can be sometimes beneficial and sometimes detrimental. But its defining propriety lies elsewhere: as a universal sociological mechanism active in all societies - modern as well as pre-modern - myths have the power to sacralize a collective representation. And it is pointless to ask whether a myth is true or false¹². What really matters sociologically (as opposed to normatively or morally) is its cultural and social efficiency, namely its capacity to unleash collective energy and to mobilize a population into pursuing common goals, although societies can also produce myths that contradict themselves and breed inhibition and stagnation.

In itself, a social myth provides meanings, instil psychological security and confers some stability on a society. But it also grounds an ethos and, through ideologies, points to a direction for action. In that sense, it is a wager on the future (to achieve social equality, freedom, democracy, and the like)¹³.

12. This kind of questioning, however, is obviously relevant with regard to the discursive strategies and the narrative that support myths.

13. Three additional central notions complement this definition of myths - master myths, derivative myths and archemyths; they can't be addressed here for lack of space (see G. Bouchard, 2007, 2013a).

Finally, it must also be noted that myths are not exclusively associated with nations. Like the notion of symbolic foundation, they operate at various levels, from the familial to the supra-national.

1.2. Identity

A second concept associated with the notion of symbolic foundation is identity, construed in accordance with what has become the prevailing view nowadays in social sciences in the wake of F. Barth¹⁴ and many others, that is: a dialogically constructed, often mythified representation of a collective self feeding on i) more or less arbitrary self-ascribed characteristics and ii) a sense of distinctiveness strengthened by a reference to an otherness. That way, identities set off an inclusion/exclusion mechanism, they foster a sense of belonging and solidarity, and they create symbolic boundaries. It has also been shown that they are often based on distortions, they can be multiple and contradictory and they constantly change. That said, once they are deeply internalized in a group or a population, they can be lived as consistent and stable, as warm truths about oneself rather than cold, arbitrary constructs.

Myths and identities are closely linked, but they should not be confused. Myths can be used to instil a sense of distinctiveness and common fate, sometimes superiority and mission, from which derives a set of abiding mutual duties that are expected to translate into individual or collective behaviours. By contrast, identities in and of themselves are a source of belonging, solidarity and boundaries that fuel the inclusion/exclusion mechanism, but they do not convey specific goals or directions for action. In that sense, it could be said that identities are an emotional force without a program.

From the foregoing, one can measure the challenge involved in the voluntary and rationally-driven creation of a new, large scale collective entity such as the EU, arguably an unprecedented undertaking. To that end, as we will see, the EU leaders tried to build a symbolic foundation for the projected body, which raises two questions that will propel this analysis: i) how did they proceed? and b) did they succeed?

14. F. Barth (1969)

2. The founding choices of the European Union revisited

The pioneers of the EU were in the majority Christian-democrats¹⁵ pursuing the Gospel ideal of conciliation, mutual help, unity and peace. Together, they made critical choices and assumptions that have significantly weighed on the future of the EU and are still influential today in various ways. I do not assume that these choices and assumptions were shared by all founders but they constituted the dominant view among them and their successors. Here is a brief outline of the major features.

2.1. The founding choices

1. The two world wars, soon to be joined by the Shoah, were the ultimate disgrace, a brutal violation of the European humanist tradition. This powerful reference, which was at the heart of most writings related to the creation of the Union, acted as the main anchor, in support of the powerful nascent myths promoting peace, harmony and cooperation (“Never again”).
2. Because of the disastrous display of nationalisms (or ultra-nationalisms) and atrocities during the first half of the century, nations and popular classes had to be distrusted and kept at bay. The new Europe would be built by enlightened elites away from and, if necessary, against the nations. One recognizes here another tenet of the Christian-democratic thought.
3. States and their political processes had failed; they had to be disciplined. As for traditional parliamentary democracy, easily subverted by populism, it had proved unreliable and it had to be kept in check. Some believed it needed to be reformed. Others were even ready to bypass it, if need be.

¹⁵ For instance: Konrad Adenauer, Alcide de Gasperi, Robert Schuman, Paul-Henri Spaak, Joseph Bech... They were also attuned with transnational exchange through various networks that their parties had built up (E. Lamberts, 1997; W. Kaiser, 2007).

4. There was not much doubt that the people (the “populace”), although kept away from the leadership of the new great venture, would trust and follow their elites, as they usually did in exceptional times.
5. Giving priority to the economy (to the “functional”) over the “symbolic” appeared to be the best way to come out of the after-War mess. Prosperity would trump everything else¹⁶ and, in the long term, it would overcome the resistance inspired by the nations’ short-sighted and dangerous views. As a consequence, the cultural and the irrational – or more specifically: national cultures – should be treated with suspicion (“economy unites, culture divides”). This way, rationality, utilitarianism and pragmatism paradoxically joined the ranks of EU major founding myths.
6. Linked to the above, modernization was a key idea in the pioneers’ minds. There is no doubt that, in this respect, the United States was viewed as the model to replicate. It was hoped that somewhere in the future, to be modernized would be European.
7. According to an influential view, the post-WWII years were witnessing the birth of a new world calling for the end of the Wesphalian era. In the minds of many founders¹⁷, it was clear that from then on, the Nation-states had no future. There was a unique opportunity to pursue a great utopia that would change for the best the fate of Europe (and, perhaps, serve as a model to the world). The time was ripe for a new European order, a supra-national, centralized authority destined to take over the old dysfunctional national political framework.
8. Europe had to be transformed but it did not have to be rebuilt from scratch. It already existed through its unique, brilliant distinctive past and civilization. What was needed was an awakening, a return to its roots, to its true nature, a rediscovery of its remarkable trajectory and of its superior values.

16. The 1951 Robert Schuman’s “Déclaration”, inspired by Jean Monnet, was very clear on that score: “...la fusion des intérêts indispensables à l’établissement d’une communauté économique (...) introduit le ferment d’une communauté plus large et plus profonde...” (see M. Ouraoui, 2008, p. 154).

17. Not all of them. At the outset, the founders were divided between the federal and the intergovernmental model (P. Magnette, 2000). Yet, the idea of a federal Europe was at the heart of the 1948 Hague Congress and of the 1951 Schuman report (ratified by the Treaty of Paris) that many consider as the founding paper of the EU.

9. In their state of devastation and weakness, European societies had to be protected against three big threats:
 - a. the aggressively expansionist USSR¹⁸,
 - b. a quick recovery of Germany and a return to its dominating and destructive dreams,
 - c. The American economic imperialism.

Some of these choices were assumptions and admonitions, other were elements of a worldview or ideological orientations while others were authentic myths in the making (peace, harmony, cooperation, prosperity...). Together, they represent the symbolic foundation of the EU at its birth. Interestingly, some contradictions come to light. Despite the firm commitment of the founders to reason and functionality, several choices were authentic myths or had the potential to evolve into full-fledged myths as defined above. This was the case with values such as respect for human life, peace, prosperity, cooperation, rule of law, rationality, pragmatism, the belief in a supra-national order, and the nation as a foil¹⁹. The constraints of action, however, were going to progressively establish an informal hierarchy and a practical cohesion amid these finalities.

I do not claim that these founding choices by themselves drove the birth and growth of the Union, but at least they helped in creating the cultural background conducive to the critical initial steps – along with other factors, including the pursuit of material and states’ interest²⁰. They were also influential in shaping the governance model and future policies.

So, somewhat unexpectedly, myths actually played a significant role at that time. However, for several decades, the leaders appeared strangely unconcerned by this dimension of their project.

18. The Belgium statesman Paul-Henri Spaak once said that Stalin was the father of the EU.

19. The reader will notice that, contrary to a widespread view (often reiterated by the Union’s discourse), human rights, social equality and democracy were not part of the founding myths.

20. One must make room for the thesis advanced by A. S. Milward (*The European Rescue of the Nation-State*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1992, 477 pages) that the first member states were first and foremost motivated by the benefits that they could derive from the Union.

2.2. A critical view

In the aftermath of the WWII, these choices instantly or progressively enjoyed a strong support among the elites, especially those at the forefront of the European project. They combined to arouse enough enthusiasm to launch the bold venture soon to give birth to major economic initiatives. Indeed, the founding choices looked particularly appropriate in the post-war context. Moreover, there appeared to be no real alternatives given the understandable prevailing mindset and the state of geopolitics at that time. Over the years, however, these choices would either lose their grips or hinder the development of the EU. Actually, a close linkage²¹ can be made between each of the founding choices and the predicaments that are now facing the Union. Let's consider this:

- Over the long run, building on the atrocities of the wars and other crimes perpetrated before by European countries (through colonialism, slavery, totalitarianism, fascism, genocide...) instilled a sense of guilt and shame that is now somewhat counter-productive. It stifles the feelings of pride, confidence and excitement of which the future of the EU is now badly in need. It also undermines attempts to use the past as a source of self-esteem, as most collectivities do (or try to do)²². Besides, as the actors and witnesses of the war disappear, its tragic memory is fading, particularly among the youth, even in Germany where the memory of this dark time does not resonate as it used to do in the political and historical discourse. As a result, the present young generation may cast a colder gaze at the future of the Union²³. More generally, the EU has accomplished a lot in various areas but many youths do not seem to be much impressed by these historical achievements. Somewhat, the Union appears to be victim of its own success.
- The distrust of nations, nationalisms and the democratic process contributed to the adoption of a top-down approach for the European project

21. I am careful here. Given the limits of qualitative analysis as regards causality (it allows no measurement), my goal is only to establish that the symbolic sphere was a contributing factor among others. I have no way to demonstrate a formal causality or to show that myths were the driving force. I am relying mostly on significant combinations of actions and converging pathways.

22. Referring to the European project, Jean-Paul Sartre, the French philosopher, wrote in the foreword to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961): "On ne prétend plus nous sauver du naufrage que par le sentiment...de notre culpabilité. C'est la fin". On this, see O. Galland, B. Roudet (2005), C. Delsol, J.-F. Mattéi (2010), J. Prieur (2012).

23. I am relying here on O. Galland, B. Roudet (2005), L. Hooghe, G. Marks (2005), T. Judt (2006), A. Sonntag (2011, p. 123).

and ultimately to the “democratic deficit” that is widely deplored nowadays²⁴. It was understood that the elites, working against the perceived obscurantism, primitive instincts, and untrustworthy moods of the popular classes, had a duty to reconnect with the great European humanist tradition (notably the Enlightenment but also Christianity) and its lofty goals, which were beyond the reach of ordinary people. In doing so, the leaders were also creating a legitimacy issue that still endures.

- The priority granted to economy added to this “benign despotism” (Delors²⁵) by emphasizing the role of experts (the infamous Brussels “eurocrats”). Resorting to the neo-functional model with its spill-over mechanism (“pragmatic incrementalism”) was a congruent move. But relying primarily on material profit and sidestepping culture to drive the construction of the Union was a risky choice: what would happen if (as is presently the case) the economy falters? Would the euro, as an identity staple, be robust enough to generate solidarity and to preserve unity over the long haul? More generally, the EU might be left with not enough substantial symbolic assets to help alleviate and overcome its old and recent woes.
- After a few decades, modernization was no longer a great idea. It had realized its potential and lost its appeal. Post-modernity has become the new keyword.
- The people did not follow their elites as much as it was hoped. As revealed by various measures of popular support and identification to the Union, many Europeans remain rather distant and, in some instances, some have expressed a clear discontent with the European project. According to D. Debomy²⁶ who did a thorough analysis of the Eurobarometers for the period 2005-2015, the satisfaction regarding the belonging to the EU remained at the same level in 2005 and in 2015 (with variations in between). However, the overall trust in the EU and its future

²⁴. Among many others, see D. N. Chryssochoou (2000), R. M. Jennar (2004), M. Haller (2008), J. Zielonka (2006). The thesis is also shared by most scholars associated with the “political contentious” studies (R. Koopmans, P. Stratham, D. Imig, S. Tarrow...). For an opposite point of view: G. Majone (2000), A. Moravcsik (2004), V. A. Schmidt (2010).

²⁵. *Independant*, 26 July, 1993.

²⁶. D. Debomy, 2016.

remains low (32%) and is declining. The image of the EU has also deteriorated between 2007 and 2015. To some extent, the distrust between Brussels and the nations is now mutual. That being said, the figures attest to a lot of diversity among the member states.

- One may wonder if it was a reasonable plan to compress the symbolic and emotional part of the collective life. It is now obvious that rationality and economic progress have not suppressed “irrational obstacles”, especially national myths and identities. Moreover, the rejection of the irrational has left the EU ill-prepared to redress its course. Most attempts to build a European symbolic foundation now must confront a difficult challenge, having to compete with well-entrenched national cultures that have enjoyed a quasi-monopoly in the sphere of myths, memory, identity and traditions (more about that below).
- The Wesphalian order has been weakened but states have survived by redefining themselves, especially as guardians of the people against supra-national forces, including the EU. As a result, the management of the relationship between Brussels and the member states has become a tricky business. To say the least, the replacement of the Nation-states by a central European authority has been delayed. Over the last decades, Nation-states have proliferated across the world – the United Nations is now comprised of close to 200 members (51 in 1945).
- The “rediscovery” of the distinct nature of Europe rooted in a long prestigious past has proved problematic, given the contrasted, conflictual and pluridimensional course of European history, wherein the best and the worst intertwine. This endeavour is now enmeshed in great difficulties, leading historians to desperately search for a consistent and distinctive European trajectory that could serve as a moral compass but, by all accounts, does not seem to exist.
- It is not obvious that the EU, as a supra-national authority, has been successful in taking over the supposedly old dysfunctional statist political order. For instance, the leaders may have underestimated the deep cleavages that beset the continent, a plight that has been dramatically worsened by an all-out enlargement of the Union over the past twenty years.

As a result, Brussels finds itself ensnared in a web of conflicting expectations and claims while its bureaucracy has mushroomed.

- The three big threats that originally acted as a uniting and mobilizing force have now subsided, if not disappeared. The USSR is dead, the United States is no longer in a situation to dominate and rule Europe, and Germany, even reunified, has become one of the most devoted member states²⁷. This leaves the rapidly enlarged EU with a void of powerful symbolic leverage to feed its projected identity, to weather the present multifaceted crisis and to support its future development.

Finally, it is worth noting that the Christian influence has lost its old grip with the secularizing trend and the growth of material values that have transformed Europe in the second half of the 20th century. There might be a legacy of this spiritual patrimony but most of it has merged into the new discourse of universal values, human rights and civic solidarity.

2.3. The EU against the nations?

One particularly damaging founding choice lies in the mistrust, if not rejection of nations and nationalism. It is not a stretch to say that, to some extent, the EU has been conceived against the nations (or national cultures), which partly accounts for the lukewarm feeling of ordinary people about the EU. This statement, however, needs clarifications. Actually, what we observe within the Union is a complex, highly unpredictable three-actor play operating at three levels:

1. First, there are the Europeanists or EU elites. Embodying the supranational dream, they are committed to the reinforcement and the development of the EU, possibly as a federal structure. They include most of the members of the Commission and the European Parliament, the EU high-ranking officials, and various intellectuals and researchers (some of them commissioned and many of them financially supported by the EU) dedicated

²⁷. Paradoxically, some have seen in this turn of events a source of concern. It has even been forecasted that with the collapse of the USSR, the EU was doomed... (S. Rosato, 2011, p. 245).

to the advancement of the European project. These elites also include the personnel of the Court of justice, of the European Central Bank and of a few other EU instances.

2. The second group of actors consists of the heads of the member states. Despite forming the very influential European Council (which shapes the EU's policy agenda), they should not be confused with the EU elites since they are also directly accountable to their national constituencies (upon whom their reelection depend) and, as such, they are entrusted with the defence of their interests²⁸. As has been shown by C. J. Bickerton²⁹, they play a complex double game, being torn between their sometimes conflicting European and national allegiances and responsibilities, although they have learned to often use strategically this otherwise uncomfortable, even contradictory situation.

3. Lastly, the populations of the member states must be dealt with separately, and from two angles. As citizens (the "people"), they embody the popular sovereignty that is the cornerstone of democratic states and secures their political legitimacy. But they can also be culturally construed as nations, that is, bodies of shared worldviews, identity, memory, myths and traditions that provide the symbolic foundation of a state. It is mostly to this cultural dimension that I am referring to when I say that the EU has been to a large extent created and has operated against the nations³⁰.

In short, the EU has always harboured a political tension with the member states and a cultural tension with the nations. My analysis focuses on the latter.

28. According to A. S. Milward (1992), the member states are fully and exclusively committed to the defence of their interests. I do not completely share this thesis that calls for some nuance. Even the defence of "their" interests in Brussels sometimes puts the states in awkward position vis-à-vis the nations. This is the case when they blame the Union for unpopular policies that they have actually endorsed. It is well known, for example, that French political leaders delegated to the EU the task of (neo)liberalizing France's economy, a process which they supported behind close doors in Brussels, while railing against it back home (P. Magnette, 2000; P. A. Hall, 2005). Along the same line, Magnette has provided an insightful analysis showing, for instance, that the chiefs of the member states found a common interest in letting the European Court of Justice expand its jurisdiction (p. 96-97, 252-253). In the same book, he has also shown that, actually, the EU has grown pragmatically, navigating between the federal and the intergovernmental model.

29. C. J. Bickerton, 2012.

30. I do not want to suggest that these set of actors are homogeneous and behave unanimously, far from that. But they hail from specific power and collective arenas and they share identical basic interests. There are of course many other actors involved in the EU activities (interest groups, cities, regional authorities...); I focus on those which are the most relevant for this analysis.

There has been, as I have mentioned, a tradition of disparaging discourse on the nations among Europeanists, which has assumed various forms; here are a few examples:

- Blaming the atrocities of the two world wars on the basically perverted nature of nations and nationalisms;
- Adopting, from the outset, a top-down approach, as a way to exclude the untrustworthy nations (or the ordinary people) from the decision-making process;
- Picturing nations as basically inward-looking, backward, illiberal, fascist, racist and bellicose, as opposed to the virtuous Union³¹. Such a discourse at the same time invites to build a strictly civic, rational, universalist, even cosmopolitan order with a view to restraining national cultures and nationalisms, and thus weakening the traditional linkage between nation, sovereignty and states territory;
- Seeking to build a European people (“polity”) and a European identity relying on a supra-national memory, as a substitute for national cultures and popular sovereignty³²;
- Trying to relocate citizenship at the continental level, which has led many analysts to believe that European citizenship is not only about rights but also about power;
- Criticizing national identities and myths and, over the past 20-25 years, trying to create competing European counterparts;
- Attempting to bypass the nations, as well as the states, by speaking directly to cities, regions, minorities, associations and other sub-national actors³³;
- Celebrating market and economic trans-national interdependence as the true “glue” of the European community.

One could reply that this dark picture is exaggerated since, in several official documents - including the treaties - the EU committed itself to the protection of national identities and cultures as part of continental diversity. These declarations, however, have not been followed through in terms of persistent,

31. This, for instance, clearly comes through in the interviews made by C. Shore (2000) with a sample of EU civil servants. It is also consistent with my own numerous exchanges with EU officers a few years ago.

32. “There will be no peace in Europe if the states re-establish themselves on the basis of national sovereignty” (Jean Monnet, in a 1943 memorandum quoted in its *Memoirs*, 1978, p. 222).

33. This echoes a motto crafted, again, by Jean Monnet: “Nous ne coalisons pas des États, nous unissons des hommes”.

widespread, concrete initiatives, lest they awake the worms of nationalism. One could also - and rightly - argue that the EU has been helpful to the member states by promoting human rights and liberal values as a framework within which they can live and flourish³⁴. Such contribution, however, mostly concerns the civic life rather than national cultures *per se*.

Yet, despite being kept at bay by the EU elites, nations have survived and their marginalization now carries a price. For a long time, the EU has prioritized its rational, utilitarian philosophy. It has also relied on powerful founding myths whose purchase has progressively declined such that the EU is now largely deprived of an emotional mobilizing power still very much alive in the Nations-states. As a result, it can hardly aspire to become a robust political body, let alone a viable federation.

³⁴. W. Kymlicka, 2006.

3. Building a European symbolic foundation

As already mentioned, the EU has been able at its birth to rely on a few powerful myths (despite its firm commitment to rationality) and ideological choices that have catalysed its growth. But for many years, little has happened in the symbolic area. In the 1970s, however, a growing concern about a European identity appeared. As for myths *per se*, the topic really picked up steam only in the 1990s. In both cases, the fear of a weakening, if not a collapse of the EU facing new difficulties was the driving factor. The economic crisis of the 1970s was relayed in the 1990s and early 2000s by an uncertainty brought about by the rapid enlargement of the EU (six new members between 1981 and 1995, ten in 2004) and a stagnant popular support.

3.1. European myths: recent proposals... and failures

To make up for the still alive but decreasing hold of the EU founding myths (especially the repellent symbol of the Shoah and the protection against old external threats), a host of proposals have been set forth with a view to advancing the mythification of various European values and ideals. This has been the case with human rights, freedom, democracy, cultural pluralism, social equality (a “social Europe”), gender equality, the “green Europe”, building a true “European dream” (on the ashes of the American dream), reviving the Christian tradition, mapping out a second Renaissance, prosperity, rationality, spirituality, post-national citizenship, “Unity in diversity” (or “United in diversity”), focusing on a bright future (and escaping the “shameful memory”), universalism, world peace keeping, soft (“moral”) power, Europe as a shield against globalization or as “the new world laboratory”, cosmopolitanism, etc.

Studies, however, have shown that for various reasons, few of these attempts has proved really successful as purely *European* myths (as opposed to *national* myths), the major exceptions being peace, respect for human life³⁵ and

35. Needless to say, this value was also promoted by the Nation-states but it has been the object of a particular emphasis by the EU.

cooperation³⁶. Each proposal has its own story, which cannot be recalled here. Let's say that in many cases, the myth was already well grounded at the level of the nations. In other cases, (for instance, the motto "Unity in diversity", virtuous foreign policy, spirituality, moral power), the message sounded hollow or smacked of angelism. Likewise, widely criticized for being subservient to neo-liberalism³⁷, the EU lacked the credibility to erect itself as a guardian against it and to preach the social gospel.

Promoting a teleological discourse that banks on the promise of the future, as some scholars have suggested³⁸, could not work efficiently as it did in the United States where this ideal relied on powerful founding myths. Besides, erasing its footprints as a way to escape its dark memories looks like an unrealistic and dangerous recipe for Europe. The past will always be there, as a shadow or otherwise, repressed or not. Moreover, stifling the memory at the continental level would only allow it to survive within the nations, thus reinforcing their symbolic grip and enlarging the current cultural gap.

As for potential missions in the world, since they were not buttressed by a military force, they have not been taken really seriously by the major world actors. Besides, the European pretence to embody righteousness in international affairs has been met with scepticism and some annoyance³⁹. The same holds for the claim of universality. The idea of acting as a "soft" power is highly commendable but, not being buttressed by a military force (by definition), it has a limited impact. Finally, the cold, rational ideal of a strictly civic order, free of myths and identity rooted in emotion, could hardly appeal to the masses, emotion being the substance of myth, identity and collective mobilization. Overall, the distrust for the "irrational" mentioned above was, from the start, an insuperable impediment.

36. See, for instance, the January 2010 thematic issue (vol. 48, no 1) of the *Journal of Common Market Studies* ("Political Myth, Mythology and the European Union"). Also, among many others: V. Della Sala (2013).

37. The EU did not resist the vast economic shift that, from the 1980s, pushed Western states toward more competitive markets and away from governmental interventionism, generating a parallel shift in the terms of the social contract (P. A. Hall, *Forthcoming*). The 1986 Single European Act, which opened the way to the removal of trade barriers, was a landmark in this regard.

38. For instance: M. Sassatelli, 2002; T. Todorov, 2004; E. Morin, 1990.

39. This attitude is regularly expressed in major American media (*International New York Times*, *Washington Post*...) and it came out very clearly from a meeting attended by a large group of world leaders in 2009 and organized by Harvard University in Anney (France). As a guest professor at Harvard at that time, I was in attendance (noticeably, the Union was not represented).

There are additional reasons. The mythification process hinges on a set of conditions that are wanting at the level of the EU⁴⁰. For instance, a major requirement is a clear vision of the collective Subject, that is, a well delineated target population with some degree of homogeneity, to which the message is intended. Through continuous expansion, the EU has become a deeply heterogeneous, even conflictual entity whose borders (spatial or otherwise) are difficult to grasp. It is therefore difficult to build an efficient imaginary of the territory, a familiar and powerful feature of national myths. A second condition is the credibility of the messenger. Here again, being regarded by many with suspicion, the EU barely qualifies, except in the mind of the elites or the most educated class.

An efficient mythification also needs to rely on a consistent, convincing narrative ideally grounded in a robust anchor and a clear trajectory, which the European past fails to provide. Indeed, it is virtually impossible to build a commendable, enticing record amid this mix of noble achievements and episodes of moral degradation, of cooperation and internal wars, of unity and fragmentation, of advances and setbacks. Even the origin of the continent can be found in several places and times and represented under different guises (from Europa to Virgil and Charles the Fifth), each carrying its own meaning. Therefore, to embody its grandeur, instead of glorious events “soaked in the blood of heroes” (as the saying goes), the EU must often turn to symbols designed by public servants. Unsurprisingly, most fall flat. All things considered, one is indeed entitled to ask: “Who will die for this Europe?” (Anthony D. Smith).

The mythification process also needs to rely on an efficient discursive network that disseminates and inculcate the message. Here, the lack of a substantial European public sphere feeding on active media attention and continental deliberation is deeply detrimental. Finally, as mentioned before, for an idea to penetrate a collective imaginary, it must connect with a cultural context and make its way into social processes and practices. To that end, a close articulation with the anxieties, challenges and dreams of the moment is paramount since the message must be perceived as bringing a solution, as opening a way toward a better life, as providing “ontological security” (A. Giddens). Nowadays, the economic insecurity linked to globalization, the concern about

⁴⁰. They are described in G. Bouchard (2014, chapters 3-4).

the future of national identity and culture, the feeling of powerlessness generated by a lack of democracy, and the protection against wild immigration and terrorism rank among the major worries of European citizens. Yet, for many of them, the solution is thought to reside at the state level, the EU being often seen as part of the problem.

The question of an external threat also deserves attention. As mentioned before, the three original menaces have either disappeared or faded. What about substitutes? Islamism has been seen as a potential new threatening Other, as has been shown by C. Bottici and B. Challand⁴¹. It could even be said that Islamist terrorism in Europe could operate as an anchor carrying a deep imprint. Perhaps the same holds for the refugee crisis. But at the present juncture, these factors can hardly be seen as powerful drivers of unification as well as sources of continental identity and solidarity conducive to progressive initiatives. Judging from what we already know, one rather fears that in many states, it could trigger an unsavoury response, just like the unfolding refugee crisis. By contrast, the three original threats had inspired an emphasis on freedom, human rights, cooperation, and promotion of race and ethnic equality.

Through its linkage with neo-liberalism, globalization could act as another candidate but it is handicapped, as I said, by EU's policies that embrace it. In another direction, J. Habermas and J. Derrida⁴² have tried to revive the fear of the USA, casting it as a foil to what a morally superior Europe could be. But the proposal has not really caught up, being criticized even by leftist intellectuals.

3.2. The ill-fated search for a European identity

Sparked mostly by the economic crisis, the search for a European identity began, as mentioned, in the 1970s (more precisely with the 1973 Copenhagen declaration) and has since continued unabated. Overall, given the impressive amount of talent and resources that have been brought to bear on this issue, the results, although sophisticated and often innovative, are rather disappointing

41. C. Bottici and B. Challand, 2013, chapter 6.

42. J. Habermas and J. Derrida, 2005.

at the practical level⁴³. A brief overview of what has been delivered so far goes like this⁴⁴:

1. A wide array of definitions of identity has been set forth, which is a source of confusion that prevents a synthetic view of the issue and consistent, practical outcomes.
2. There are a lot of theoretical discussions (and disagreement) about the notion of a European identity, generating various incompatible approaches over issues such as: political legitimacy and identity, identity versus identification, cultural versus political and civic identity, individual (psychological) or collective (sociological), structural or dynamic, primordialist or constructivist, thin or “banal”⁴⁵ versus substantial (“thick”), European versus national or global...
3. Major questions have also been raised, eliciting a broad array of conflicting responses: Why this concern about identity? Is there a European identity? Should and could there be a European identity? At what point can the link between an individual and the EU be called an identity? Can the depth of an identity be measured? Does it matter to distinguish whether identity (or identification) is affectively rather than only instrumentally motivated? To what extent are national identities the “springboard” instead of the “grave-digger” of EU identity? Can they coexist? What prevents the construction of a European identity? Should such an identity be planned as a complement or a substitute of national identities? Is Europe experiencing an identity crisis? What should be the place of religion? Is identity a prerequisite for citizenship or the other way around? Who is authorized to tell Europeans who they are?...
4. Many experts have offered a critical examination of the concept itself, often leading to its outright rejection on the grounds that a) it conveys too many, conflicting meanings, b) it is methodologically flawed, c) it is basically

⁴³. Other scholars have offered a much more pungent appraisal of this scientific thread (for instance: A. Favell, 2005).

⁴⁴. Again, the scholarship in this field is rich and massive. My research, therefore, does not pretend to be exhaustive. But I have looked at a huge part of it. Besides, I will not comment on the theoretical and methodological value of each proposal. My goal is only to provide a glimpse of the directions taken by this strain of research and of its practical outcomes.

⁴⁵. A reference to M. Billig’s (1995) concept. For a similar approach, see T. Edensor (2002).

ideological and manipulative, d) behaviours and actions matter, not identity, e) societies must do without identities because these are useless, even detrimental and threatening (they alienate, they are groundless, they breed nationalism, xenophobia, exclusion, etc.);

5. An overwhelming number of proposals have been set forth as to how a European identity should be built or what it is or should be in terms of distinctive contents. Here is a sample:
 - To tap into Europe's ancient intellectual patrimony, which in turn opens to a number of options: Greek, Roman origins, Christian tradition, Islam, Renaissance, Enlightenment...;
 - To build on the European past, focusing on the rich thread of its unique achievements in culture, economy, technology, law and politics;
 - Sidestepping the quest for borders, to bank on the so-called European values (Europe as a "community of values"), which consist of some or all of the following: peace, universalism, rationality, human rights, democracy, freedom, progress, equality, justice, tolerance, secularism, humanities, knowledge, and others (the expected overlapping with the quest for myths is obvious here);
 - To rely on the similarities of national popular cultures - though there is a wide agreement that these cultures are disappearing;
 - To carve an Habermasian-type of identity focusing on reason, universal contents and civic solidarity;
 - To promote common "European" traits (sometimes confused with values): sense of community, mutual support, life styles, critical mindset (reflexivity), uncertainty about one's self...;
 - To build a territorial imaginary (Europe as a supra-national cradle or "homeland");
 - To define the Union as a new form of empire;
 - To merge particularism and universalism;
 - To use euro as a unifying identity engine, etc.

6. Various experiments in identity creation (most of them inconclusive and not followed up) have also been carried out: a European television network (Europa TV) and telecommunications policies, common historical textbooks, intercultural initiatives with youths, various festivals, rituals, contests...

Quite expectedly, among such a plethora of disparate and diverging (if not downright contradictory) possibilities, none has reached a dominant status. Of course, nobody knows what the future holds but, as of now, the prevailing diagnosis among many analysts seems to be that either a) there is no and there will never be such thing as a true European identity or, b) there is only a weak, “banal” one, or c) it is very slowly in the making through people daily interactions and it is not clear what it is going to be in the long run⁴⁶. Again, this comes as no surprise. A vibrant identity at the continental level should nurture on robust myths and it could emerge only in the course of a long process of shared collective experience enshrined in the memory of a people⁴⁷. These conditions have not been met until now and they might never be. The history of Europe over the past five centuries has been mostly a history of multiple Subjects, that is, a large group of competing or warring Nation-states concerned with their own affairs⁴⁸.

At the present time, the attempts to build a EU identity is, as I have mentioned, a top-down endeavour. There is no substantial European imaginary⁴⁹. Scholars have also stressed the lack of a common language and of a unique, celebrated political centre as major roadblocks. Meantime, the national cultures and identities remain strong.

All in all, in terms of practical contribution to the construction of a substantial European identity from a *blueprint*, one cannot escape the conclusion that this vein of research has delivered poor results.

Some scholars have also suggested that the building of a continental symbolic foundation should replicate the familiar process that drove the formation of the Nation-states. But this obviously poses a limit to what the EU can realistically become, being devoid of the dense mythical foundation of most Nation-states. One is also reminded that political violence has been integral in the forging of national cultures from local traditions and identities, a road that the EU obviously cannot take.

⁴⁶. More on that in G. Bouchard (Forthcoming, chapter 4, part III).

⁴⁷. A. D. Smith (1992, p. 62) has expressed a similar idea though in slightly different terms, referring to a requisite pre-modern past, or a “pre-history”. The idea that a strong identity must rely on powerful myths can also be found in D. Obradovic (1996).

⁴⁸. M. Mann, 2013.

⁴⁹. Defined as a broad set of collective, structural representations deeply grounded in archetypes and expressed mostly through a set of myths and identities (G. Bouchard, 2014, p. 20-35).

3.3. Is there a future for European myths?

In the light of the preceding, the quest for a European identity appears to be a highly uncertain endeavour, no longer worthy of major investments. Identity does not easily lend itself to a top-down undertaking at the continental level, as opposed to the micro-level. There must also be an agreement on what kind of identity to promote and a close connection with a concurring development at the grassroots level, which is now wanting. However, provided it is reoriented, the search for myths seems promising and it will be the focus of the last part of this essay.

As already mentioned, in many ways, distrust has led the EU elites to distance themselves from the nations and the people, even to operate against them. This process has been aggravated by the states themselves being politically weakened in various ways.

Nations, however, are still alive. In Europe, surveys reveal that the level of identity (and identification⁵⁰) remains very high at the national scale. Likewise, national identities show no sign of a let-up⁵¹, in particular among the member states more affected by waves of immigrants and Islamist terrorism. Most old national myths and symbols have survived everywhere, even though some are engaged in a process of redefinition⁵². National memories prevail over European narratives⁵³. National territories continue to captivate imagination despite the removal of borders control. European sport and other competitions and contests are still a festival of national flags and symbols⁵⁴. National stereotypes continue to flourish⁵⁵. The responses to European issues, such as the current refugee crisis, are nationally framed, etc.

Moreover, national media echo and reinforce this mindset by focusing mostly on national affairs, even when reporting on European elections. And, beyond symbols and culture, major spheres of legislation are seen as belonging to the

50. Mostly construed as the level of support (for either the EU project or the Nation-state) rather than a strong sense of belonging and the sharing of distinctive European traits.

51. J. Citrin, J. Sides, 2004.

52. G. Bouchard, 2013b

53. S. Berger, 2005; E. Langerbacher et al., 2013.

54. See P.-R. Cloet, B. Legué, K. Martel (2013).

55. J.-N. Jeanneney, 2000.

Nation-state framework. In the light of the various predicaments that beset the EU, one is entitled to ask: has the EU become victim of its neo-functional philosophy that has led it to expand too rapidly, generating an unmanageable diversity? Is it condemned to be no more than an economic body?

Yet, even this restricted format may not be realistic without some symbolic support. A telling example is provided by the current euro crisis. According to many analysts⁵⁶, the euro has been created without the necessary mechanisms to manage it efficiently. The states retain the fiscal policy while the European Central Bank is responsible for only part of the monetary policy. There is no equivalent of the American Federal Reserve with the power to discipline local banks and various states policies, including national budgets. And there is neither real Eurobonds nor redistributing mechanisms that would allow helping sagging national economies. The solution would require more centralization, a measure that member states, concerned about their sovereignty and national pride, are reluctant to concede⁵⁷. Here again, in addition to the familiar political game among states elites, the EU hits the wall of national cultures that has hindered the development of a strong European solidarity (despite the creation of the European Stability Mechanism) and a vibrant continental symbolic foundation.

Unquestionably, the creation of the EU was a visionary undertaking which has helped maintain peace for a long time and bring prosperity to the continent. For these reasons and others, it is widely hoped that it will muster enough support to weather the current crisis (peculiarly to successfully navigate the perilous aftermath of the Brexit), and continue to grow. Only a united Europe can efficiently confront the globalized challenges of the modern times (climate changes, world economic competition, defence, terrorist threat, international corruption...). Interestingly, numerous intellectuals, politicians and other EU actors, including economists⁵⁸, have recently expressed the idea that Europe has lost its original spirit and is now in need of what has been called alternatively a “new great project”, a “new impetus”, a “new grand narrative”, a

56. E. Balibar (2010), I. P. Karolewski, A. M. Suszycki (2011, p. 185-186), H. James (2012), B. C. Tekin (2012), J. Prieur, 2012), P. A. Hall (2012, 2013, 2014), A. Mody (2013), S. Tilford (2015), P. Krugman (many pieces in his *New York Times*'s column).

57. Nonetheless, some steps have been taken down that road lately, but only under the pressure of the worsening euro area crisis. How far this make-or-break (“muddle forward”) strategy can go? Will the new measures bolstering the Stability and Growth Pact survive the present juncture?

58. for instance: E. Jones, 1970.

“rediscovery of its soul”, a “mobilizing utopia”, and the like⁵⁹. In other words: the EU is lacking powerful myths. These calls, at least implicitly, question the rationalist, pragmatist, utilitarian philosophy of the EU (Jacques Delors: “We don’t fall in love with a currency”). In other words, some emotional idealism should be injected.

Many EU advocates, however, have advised against building that kind of symbolic devices on the grounds that they can be dangerous or, at best, just useless. Other voices have also been heard explaining why such an endeavour would be doomed to fail: EU leaders lack the credibility to spearhead such a project, the age of myths is over (the post-modern, reflexive European culture is cited as an insuperable obstacle), the national myths are too powerful, it is impossible to feed myths on rationality only, there is no common ground for a unified, appealing pan-European narrative...

It has also been stressed that, the EU being what it is (an unprecedented voluntary association of states), it would be a mistake to try to replicate the familiar myths-building pattern of the Nation-states. This would simply generate a weak form of identity, and perhaps a dreadful brand of supra-nationalism. Be that as it may, as of now, nobody has convincingly demonstrated what a fitting, new symbolic overarching pattern could be, likely to rally a broad consensus.

As a legacy of major choices made a long time ago, the EU now finds itself caught in a deadlock. Whether it seeks to be just a British-style united market, a more French-style politically integrated intergovernmental accord or a kind of German-inspired federal polity, it is in need of a symbolic platform, substantial or thin, whatever we want to call it: common vision, grand narrative, ideal, soul, utopia or else. Each of these notions, in its own way, expresses a need for myths. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a huge collective project aiming to major changes and requiring a massive mobilization of people without the support of myths. Let’s recall that it has been the case with powerful ideologies that have dominated the Western world over the last two centuries, specially liberalism, labour movement, secularism and socialism. In these cases, powerful myths such as individualism, equality, freedom, democracy and rights were

⁵⁹ T. Todorov (2010, p. 169, 187), P. Lamy (2012, p. 6), I. Deak (2012), O. Guez (2013, p. 6), S. A. Bostanci (2013), N. Konstandaras (2014), F. Mogherini (2015), C. Kolvræa (2016)...

the underlying forces. Reason by itself can only go so far in providing the necessary persuading ingredients.

On the other hand, as just noted above, numerous factors conspire against the building of such a symbolic continental foundation. Is there a way out?

4. Reconciling the EU with the nations

The quest for myths is still a promising avenue, provided major intellectual and ideological adjustments are made. To avoid any misunderstanding, I wish to make clear that my argument builds on the following assumptions.

1. If the road to a strong European identity seems to be a dead end in the short term, the prospects are more favourable for myths:
 - While the former is the by-product of a long, largely silent and auto-driven maturation process, the latter are more amenable to cultural initiatives driven by credible social actors;
 - The European myths do not have to be totally invented. They can rely on pre-existing national myths and even borrow parts of their symbolic apparatus (narratives, etc.);
 - While myths speak only to one or several values, identity engages a whole collective imaginary, hence a much more complex process;
 - If identities need myths, the reverse is not true;
 - The obstacle of cultural heterogeneity is alleviated since the purchase of archetypes cuts across nations, just like the universal values to be promoted.

2. The need for EU myths or any form of symbolic platform is closely dependent on the model projected for the Union: the stronger the integration, the more substantial a symbolic foundation is needed. What follows is a proposal that fits a EU that would be very close to the “Federation of Nation-States” promoted by Jacques Delors and its Institute⁶⁰, that is: more than a merely vast economic space, and less than a truly federal configuration, wherein nations are fully recognized, but the EU retains full jurisdiction in major supra-national fields that are beyond the power of the states (defence, climate changes, global competition...).

3. One worry is that, should the EU sticks with its old policy, it stands the risk of eroding national cultures, leaving the member states with a weakened symbolic basis, while it has nothing or little to offer by way of a substitute.

⁶⁰. On this topic, see G. Ricard-Nihoul (2012).

Another worry is an increased tension between Brussels and the nations that would undermine the EU as a whole.

4. I dislike the idea, set forth by several scholars, that Europe could be thought of as being rational or civic at the continental level and immersed in “myths” and other forms of irrationality at the national level. In other words: reason above, emotion below. I see it as a particularly detrimental recipe that would just aggravate the current malaise between the EU and the nations. As stated before, I believe that national cultures, made up of both emotion and reason, are major symbolic and social resources that the EU should benefit from, hence this plea for an attempt at reconciliation⁶¹.
5. It would be wrong to reject this scenario on the grounds that myths are basically harmful. In my view, myths are sacralized values and it is up to a society – and especially to its rulers- to make sure that these values are well chosen, efficiently promoted and correctly used.
6. One must bear in mind that myths are a universal sociological mechanism. One way or another, overtly or covertly, there will always be in Europe as in all parts of the world social actors busy building myths to advance various agendas – some of them unsavoury. So, is it really a matter of choice? And, by all means, what is wrong with grounding universal values in emotion such that their currency is reinforced? Is it not right to say that one will never cherish enough freedom, human rights, equality and democracy?
7. The idea of building a different set of myths devoid of emotion and sacralization is a red herring; there are no such things as strictly “rational” myths.

How to proceed from here? If the projected EU myths are not that different in nature than the national ones, how to avoid the risks associated with competition and confrontation? According to many analysts⁶², the EU must simply make sure that it wins this battle. I have already explained why I think this is not the

61. This view of a new relationship between the EU and the nations, defined as complementary instead of antagonistic, has been expressed by several scholars lately; for instance: H. Kaelble (2005), J.-J. Wunemberger (2006), J. Lacroix (2008, p. 56-59, 111-113), C. Bee (2008, p. 446-47), L. Cram (2009), and others. One is also led to expect that the Brexit will sound the alarm and convince the EU leaders to be more sensitive to the nations' aspirations.

62. I am referring to all those (they are numerous) who believe that the Union should go its separate way and build a new, supranational layer of myths in parallel with national myths (see G. Bouchard, Forthcoming, chapter 5, part II).

right way to go. A more realistic way out of this conundrum could consist in i) bringing the nations back in by rehabilitating them, and ii) tapping into their symbolic pool. However, coming to terms with the nations would involve, on the EU side, a new set of more positive attitudes and policies in order to put an end to the current state of mutual distrust and tension.

The rehabilitation of nations and nationalisms should start with the recognition that their historical record is made up of a mix of shameful episodes and praiseworthy accomplishments. After all, through powerful social movements, sometimes culminating in upheavals and revolutions, nations and nationalisms have been associated with democracy, freedom, civic equality and human rights. As has been shown by many scholars⁶³, they have proved to be compatible with liberalism and progressive policies. Somehow, they have provided the symbolic resources necessary to sustain solidarity, political mobilization and social improvement. They have also been integral in the fight against absolute monarchies and totalitarian regimes. And in many former colonies, they have provided the framework and the engine for the emancipation process⁶⁴.

History teaches an important additional lesson. As has been compellingly demonstrated by decades of solid research by the so-called “constructivist” (and “modernist”) scholars⁶⁵, the elites rather than the people have built nations and nationalisms, including national myths⁶⁶. Through powerful channels (school, army, media, religion, literature, historical writings, popular rituals...), starting at the end of the 18th century, they have inculcated the national creed among the populations, even imposed it upon them, and then utilized it to pursue their own interests: to buttress and expand capitalism, to set up the modern state, to stifle the growing class consciousness and curb social protest, to wage wars, and so forth. Sometimes, they lost control of nationalism which then got out of hands, but overall, they managed to pull the strings efficiently.

63. Yael Tamir, Charles Taylor, Will Kymlicka, David Miller, Liah Greenfeld, Alain Dieckhoff, and others.

64. I leave aside, as irrelevant to my argument, the question of whether all these attributes were structurally or contextually linked to the national framework. I am only interested in stressing the existence of this linkage.

65. Such as E. J. Hobsbawm (1992), E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger (2012), E. Gellner (1983), A. Giddens (1985), B. Anderson (1991), J. Breuilly (1993), A. M. Thiesse (1999), E. Weber (1976), M. Bertrand et al (2003) and others.

66. Anthony D. Smith, who is critical of the constructivists' view (he believes that the elites have not invented from scratch, that there was a preexisting ethnic core on which they could build), also acknowledges in his works the major role of the elites (A. D. Smith, 1986).

forms of nationalism fed on animosity and hatred, thus opening the road to the well-known butchery⁷⁰.

This “revisionist” view runs against a powerful intellectual tide. Indeed, it flies in the face of a deeply ensconced antipathy towards nations and nationalisms, and to many readers, it will appear preposterous. However, it is noteworthy that this radical hostility prevails mostly in Europe. In many places outside of this continent, nations and nationalisms have proved to be less harmful and, in many cases, they have been harmless or even helpful – think of Scandinavia, Australia, New Zealand, most countries of Latin America, English Canada, Québec, and other parts of the world during the decolonizing era. To a large extent, this also holds for countries or nations of Europe itself such as Switzerland, Netherlands, Denmark, Scotland, Catalonia, Wallonia... Even in the darkest times of Russia and China, nationalism was not the primary culprit. Besides, the majority of European nations have for a long time celebrated lofty myths such as freedom, democracy, equality, civic rights and tolerance⁷¹. It is therefore unfair to exclusively associate people and nations with racism, xenophobia, parochialism and war, as so many scholars do (including famous intellectuals such as George Orwell, Bertrand Russell, Albert Einstein, Lord Acton, and others).

This raises a huge and embarrassing question for Europeans: why is it that on this continent, nations and nationalisms have drifted so tragically in contrast with the way they have played out elsewhere⁷²? For all its refinement and great humanist tradition (Christianity, Renaissance, Enlightenment...), Europe as a whole has a particularly violent track record at home (totalitarianism, internecine wars, genocide) and abroad (colonialisms, plundering, slavery, torture). One understands that the need for scapegoating was intense among the elites, leading them to promote a powerful, highly emotional counter-myth expressing the malevolence of nations and nationalism, carefully associated with irrational popular masses and closed to questioning – which is the hallmark of a full-fledged myth. Yet, because of the prestige rightly attached to European

⁷⁰. This being said, note that the Union is itself scapegoated by the member States when the latter blame Brussels for unpopular policies that they have discreetly approved – if not initiated – in the first place. As already mentioned, the adoption of neo-liberal policies is an example in point (P. Dardot, C. Laval, 2010; T. Judt, 2011).

⁷¹. W. Kymlicka (2006, p. 129) appropriately observes that most European societies which converted to nationhood since the end of the 18th century came to adopt “systems of liberal-democracy”.

⁷². According to M. Mann (2013, p. 173), Europe saw more wars over the last centuries than any other part of the world.

thought, the dark vision of nations and nationalism have lived on and spread across the world. I am not at all denying that nationalism has too often been associated with terrible instances of abuse and crime. Yet, some de-europeianization of the national discourse would come in handy. There is a pressing need to distinguish between hard and soft and other brands of nationalism, and to look beyond popular classes to understand its real nature and functioning. Nationalism in many parts of the worlds has nothing in common with what happened in Germany, Italy, Central and Eastern Europe during the WWII.

To sum up, I wholeheartedly support the view that nationalism can assume aggressive forms that must be fought, but what matters most is to discipline the elites (or the ruling class) which arouse them by manipulating ordinary people. Thus, I propose a reorientation of the research agenda that could advance the reflexion on nations and nationalism and open a new horizon for the construction of European myths⁷³.

The scapegoating strategy has placed the EU founders before a double, difficult challenge: i) to unite the member states while distrusting if not rejecting the nations, and ii) to build and perpetuate a new symbolic foundation beyond and in competition with the old, well entrenched national cultures. On both counts, it was an uphill battle.

⁷³. In order to make my thesis easier to share, it has been suggested that I avoid using the words nations and nationalisms on the grounds that they are very negatively connotated in Europe. But I wonder about the relevance of using different words (nationalities, national cultures, patriotism...) to refer to the same things.

5. An alternative scenario: the europeanization of national myths

In search of new myths, the EU should be able to harness national cultures⁷⁴, this *réservoir* of meanings, beliefs, solidarities, motivations and collective energy, without creating situations of duplication, tension and conflict. In this regard, Europe is faced with a difficulty since its past is made for the most part of nations doggedly pursuing their own (often conflicting) agendas. As a result, it lacks a deep symbolic common ground. Nations, however, have aplenty. Besides, removing the duplication and competing relationship between the EU and the nations would do away with the main hindrance on the road to efficient European myth-building. It would also make easier the EU governance.

5.1. The europeanization of national myths

One can imagine various ways for the EU to capitalize on national cultures without endangering them, in a spirit of symbiosis or hybridization, in such a way that each nation comes to perceive the EU as a flexible framework in which it can express itself and grow in line with its singular trajectory (see Box 1 for examples):

BOX 1 ► The europeanization of national myths: examples

One way could consist in *re-founding*, that is, to make use of the structure of existing national myths (their most universal values, their archetypal foundation, their contextual articulation) and inject them with additional, compatible European contents (including narratives), thus expanding their hold geographically and socially.

According to a second device (*re-cycling*), it would be possible to pursue the same goal by reworking the scaffolding of the myth (the anchor, the imprint, the symbols, the commemorative rituals) such that it conveys the same value but at a wider scale.

⁷⁴. This also holds for stateless national cultures.

Piggybacking is another avenue. It consists in crafting a new (EU) myth in continuity or in filiation with an old (national) one in order to partake of and increase its authority.

In the same vein, P. Magnette⁷⁵ has developed the concept of *de-centering* (“*décentrement*”) as a way to reconcile national and European citizenships⁷⁶. Other similar devices could be devised and tested, in the same spirit: to carve polysemic European myths that resonate both at the European and the national level.

Note that in all these instances, anchors (traumas or great accomplishments) do not have to be invented – anyway, it would be impossible. They already exist in the past of nations as well as in the past of Europe itself: Renaissance, Enlightenment, the growth of democracy and human rights, Inquisition, colonialism, wars, fascism, genocide.... These are events and experiences that have unfolded at the continental scale and could be used as bases for a positive ethos. Actually, the proposal could proceed in two steps or directions: a) to work at the European level on anchors, imprints and values that potentially speak to all nations, and b) to proceed from particular nations with a view to “aggrandizing” their myths. One way or another, the basic idea is to link universal values with emotion.

In doing so, there is no need to bully the nations. On the contrary, this could and should be done in conversation with and between them, so to speak, with a view to promoting and expanding their own myths such that each one, in its own way, feels at home within the enlarged Union’s symbolic framework. The process should also build on the specific underpinning historical contexts, the motivations and expectations that drove each nation into the Union in the first place. Otherwise, the whole endeavour would boil down to sheer manipulation.

Unfortunately, the best known cases that could instantiate the three devices mentioned above fall in this category⁷⁷. One paradigmatic example relates to 19th century France and the attempt to reconcile the old robust regional or

⁷⁵ P. Magnette, 2007.

⁷⁶ On this idea, see also J. Lacroix, 2008, p. 111-113).

⁷⁷ For instance, the way USSR, after WWII, tried to “sovietise” Poland’s (J. Prokop, 1995) and Romania’s (I. Buse, 2008, p. 136-138) national myths. On this and related topics, see G. Bouchard (2014, p. 96-118).

Such an undertaking requires an effort that goes well beyond simple communication or shallow framing strategies. Searching for hybridization and synergy in a spirit of democracy requires the crafting of flexible, transparent and fairly balanced symbolic configurations that enjoy a broad reach through a close connexion with the aspirations and the anxieties of the moment. In other words: one European voice with various national echoes.

For instance, the myth of equality has been celebrated in several European countries and, to this extent, it could be part of a continental culture. In each of them, however, it has taken on different meanings (equality of civic rights in France, of living conditions in Sweden, etc.) and it relies on specific narratives. The same goes with the myths of freedom, universality, democracy and human rights (all these values have been subjected to specific, singular historization processes). It should be possible to engineer a mutually reinforcing dynamic between these assets so that they feed off each other and assume the status of European myths, in line with the EU's motto: Unity in diversity.

The proposal would escape criticisms from two additional directions. On the one hand, it would promote only national myths that are congruent with universal values pursued by the EU⁸⁰, thus avoiding a nationalist threat at the state level. On the other hand, in focusing on universal values, it would also prevent the formation of a supra-national perverse brand of nationalism. That said, two questions come up. Is it politically realistic, can EU leaders come to terms with this agenda and its assumptions? And if so, is it too late?

Finally, one should not preclude that the construction of new myths will not weigh significantly on the course of the EU. But at the present juncture, all potentially useful initiatives should be welcome.

80. Needless to say, national myths inciting withdrawal, xenophobia or domination will be rejected.

CONCLUSION

The core idea that drives this essay is that the EU needs to develop an emotional appeal for purposes that are both internal (to mobilize citizens, to increase solidarity) and external (to more efficiently fulfil its role in the world). As stated above, the Union has made a long-lasting contribution to peace and economic development and it certainly deserves to survive and to grow. One of its primary – and unquestionably lofty – goal was to reduce the Nation-states’ selfishness and to promote universal ideals. However, as we have seen, in the pursuit of this goal, some strategies were counter-productive. Given the current uncertainty, what the EU could become in the long run is anybody’s guess. It presently suffers from a structural tension with nations which harbour a fair amount of distrust of Brussels. This feeling has many causes and is expressed in various ways:

- A low level of support and a weak European identity;
- The growth of rightist nationalisms in all member states;
- The scorn for Brussels’ technocrats;
- The resentment of the Union’s undemocratic procedures⁸¹.

Other serious predicaments – let alone the euro and the refugee crises – impede the development of the EU which seems to lack the economic, political and cultural means to respond efficiently. For this reason and others, it has been often appropriately stressed that the EU is at a crossroads, that it is time to take stock and to make a fresh start propelled by a new symbolic agenda. Among others, N. Konstandaras⁸² has forcefully expressed this view: “The Union’s survival (...) needs ideas. Perhaps it is time to call in the dreamers (...). We need a grand convention on the future of what is, above all, a beacon of humanity”. It

81. I do not mention the rather low level of participation in the European elections since the interpretation of this indicator is more complex than it appears. For instance, Y. Bertoincini (2014) has showed that the familiar thesis of a low electoral participation as a reflection of a weak support for the EU must be qualified. One must take into account the diversified evolutions between the member states, the competition with simultaneous local elections, some important demographic biases, and other factors.

82. N. Konstandaras, 2014.

is now apparent that the old top-down philosophy inspired by a distrust of and a willingness to sideline the nations has become counter-productive.

One must reckon with a fact: as well entrenched bodies of languages, identities, narratives, solidarities and myths, nations are not likely to disappear soon⁸³. Besides, for many people, they are still the first shelter where they can take refuge whenever they feel threatened and where they still have a voice. Instead of confronting them, the EU should find a way to build bridges and join forces with them. In this spirit, by reducing the tension between Brussels and the nations, my proposal would make the Union more palatable to European citizens and, to that extent, it would take some wind out of the rightist nationalisms' sails.

Somehow, the EU could have found imaginative ways to borrow and harness this symbolic pool in order to bolster its project by creating a strong sense of belonging and solidarity that is now wanting. Instead, from the 1970s, the EU has chosen to build its own symbolic foundation in parallel and competition with national cultures and, overall, it has failed.

I am not suggesting that a stronger symbolic asset would have spared the EU the throes of the present woes and its inability to make decisions on other major issues, from the Iraq war to the current refugee crisis. But it is fair to say that, by enhancing solidarity, it could have reduced animosity, fostered a better relationship between the dissenting or conflicting member states and helped them better navigate the current situation. Overall, half a century after S. Hoffmann's⁸⁴ prediction, one is entitled to confirm that neo-functionalism has failed to take Europe beyond the Nation-state.

What matters most, what is really threatening, is not myths *per se* as much as the agendas and strategies of social actors and rulers who build, inculcate, perpetuate and utilize them for their own purposes, while deflecting them from their original finality – as often happens with religion. This is where a collective control should be applied through independent, critical media, civic education

⁸³. States have been weakened over the past decades more than nations. One could even argue that the latter have found a new source of resilience in the (relative) decline of the former.

⁸⁴. S. Hoffmann, 1966.

and vigilance, vibrant democracy, combined action of pressure groups and watchdogs. This is precisely a major role to which the EU could commit itself jointly with the states, thus creating a checks-and-balances mechanism⁸⁵. And this is where a European public sphere would be instrumental. This is also how it could come of age.

Could the construction of European myths lead to a continental aggressive, harmful supranationalism? Again, the answer lies in the behaviour of the ruling class which, as we know, can pervert the most virtuous myths into instruments of degradation. The determining factor is the capacity of the civil society to exert an efficient control on the decision-making process, which raises the question of the health and future of democracy in Europe. Again, this remark highlights the necessity for the EU to reform its highly centralized model of governance. In its present state, this model offers various opportunities for manipulation.

Finally, if we are to believe the doomsayers, the EU is faced with a dark future and it may well collapse. But nations won't. Brussels should take notice.

⁸⁵. Actually, this is a role that the Union is already playing efficiently through its promotion of civil rights and other liberal values (W. Kymlicka, 2006). In the same vein, see P. Magette (2000).

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EUROPEAN WORKS

Foreword by Jacques Delors and Christian Caujolle, Introduction by Aziliz Gouez, Éditions Filigranes, October 2008

THE CONCEPT OF EUROPEAN IDENTITY IN EU TEXTS AND POLICIES

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REUNITING EUROPE: EUROPE'S QUEST FOR IDENTITY/IES

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He has earned several distinctions, including the Canadian Governor General's Award in 2000 for his book, *Genèse des nations et cultures du Nouveau Monde*, and the French Legion of Honor in 2002. In 2007, along with Charles Taylor, he was Co-President of the Quebec Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences (CCPARDC).



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EUROPE IN SEARCH OF EUROPEANS THE ROAD OF IDENTITY AND MYTH

This study by G rard Bouchard is a plea in favour of the European Union (EU). Yet, it is also critical of some choices it has made in the past, choices that now hinder its development.

According to the author, EU's pioneers and their successors made the unfortunate choice to generally distrust the nations as well as the people, and to sidestep them by opting for a top-down process of governance. In order to break this vicious circle, the EU will have to find a way to mend fences with the nations in order to put an end to a long-standing detrimental tension, harness rather than stifle the nations' still substantial symbolic resources and energy, and secure a platform to build new European myths.

This Study seeks to demonstrate that the EU needs to redefine its relationship with the nations (as configurations of culture, not to be confused with the states). It is assumed that any form of social link, however thin, must rely on some shared basic symbolic assets.

A first part recalls the founding cultural choices that have allowed the EU to take off and to enjoy a rapid development after WWII. The second part proceeds to show how the same choices can be linked to the major predicaments that are besetting the EU today. After having efficiently propelled the EU, most of the founding choices have become somewhat counter-productive mainly because they have not been revised and adapted to the changing conjunctures.

The analysis then goes on to review the unsuccessful subsequent attempts made by the EU over the past decades to develop new myths and a European identity. Finally, examples of a new way to build the future myths are offered, essentially through what I call a europeanization of national myths. The goal is to carve myths that would resonate both at the continental and national levels. In other words: to fashion a true European voice with strong national echoes.

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