



Acting European: Identity, Belonging and the EU of Tomorrow

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ABSTRACT

The growth in the success of Eurosceptic parties at the national and international level has led EU actors to recognise that continued support for the project requires strengthening bottom-up ownership of the Union, namely by strengthening a sense of European belonging. However, political debates around identity tend to be framed according to the far-right's exclusionary and fixed understanding of the term. That is, discussions of this topic often repeat the assumptions of Eurosceptic parties, even when their authors are pro-European – an example being Guy Verhofstadt's repeated references to a supposed 'European civilisation'.

Opposing this assumption, this report analyses how European identity is performed by a set of actors and institutions. It discovers that identity is enacted as a cultural trait, as a political device and as a reactive process – driven not by geography, institutional belonging or legal citizenship but by values, ideals and ideas which are collated here under the banner of 'Europeanness'. Finally, it looks at how the EU uses its official symbols and cultural strategy to represent such a shared sense of identity.

The examples reveal that Europeanness, rather than being a pre-existent category, can emerge in specific contexts; however, such a potential is not yet deployed by the EU in a manner that is consistent with the values of progressives. This report sets the scene for a progressive understanding of the term identity – followed by recommendations to guide future strategies and policies that foster it.



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CONTENT OF THE PAPER

Introduction

Current debates on the 'Future of Europe' are unfolding at a time of adversity for the EU and high distrust in its actors and institutions. **Interrelated and overlapping crises have damaged confidence in the future of the European project among citizens across the continent.** Surveys reveal increased levels of dissatisfaction among voters with their leaders at the European level, and a disillusionment with politicians and the democratic process in general. As nativist, nation-first populisms become acceptable in the mainstream and a pro-Europe stance begins to sound elitist and old-fashioned, Eurosceptic voices call for measures beyond mere institutional reform, questioning the value the EU adds to the lives of its citizens.

The decision of a narrow but decisive majority of eligible UK voters to end their country's membership of the European Union was a critical milestone in a history of lost plebiscites on 'the EU issue'. Though two constituent units of member states withdrew from the European Economic Community (EEC), no Member State electorate had previously voted to withdraw from the bloc. As the EU's influence wanes in the world, it stands to lose around 15% of its economic weight as well as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Of critical significance, however, is the way in which Brexit contravenes a traditional EU doctrine: once the institutional mechanisms are in place to create a de facto supranational solidarity, the integration process will continue unidirectionally and irreversibly toward an 'ever closer union of peoples'. The act of withdrawal runs antithetical to the integration project, representing the oppositional force of disintegration. 'Brexit means Brexit', as it were—but whatever the term will in fact come to mean, the affair proves that **it is possible for the EU to shrink** as well as to enlarge.

With a rise in support for far-right, nationalist and populist parties in the 2019 European elections, albeit at a lower level than was being predicted by polling in advance, **debates on the future of Europe are once again being carried out across different fora.** The relative success of Greens and Liberals with an unabashedly pro-internationalist message, and the decrease in the vote for both the centre-right and centre-left has lent the debate a renewed vigour. As the reality of the UK referendum and related challenges in the neighbourhood and across the Atlantic become concrete, the first signs of a path forward is becoming visible. The remaining EU member states appear as united and determined as they have been at any time since the 2008 global financial crisis. Support for the EU has only risen since June 2016 (Mortimer 2017). When Britain makes her exit, she might take certain persistent barriers to further integration with her, opening new opportunities for Europe to reinvent itself. **We should then ask ourselves what the EU is going to do with its unity in adversity, how long it will last, and the role that identity will play in the years to come.** It also may not do so. Eurosceptic voices and voices which are in favour of the EU but not necessarily of continuous 'ever closer union' exist well beyond the shores of 'perfidious Albion'. Nevertheless for the time being identity in and relating to Europe is rising to the surface of many discussions.

Identities, like institutions, predate the people who possess them, and persist through posterity after they perish as part of the inheritances of succeeding generations. New generations inherit the identity label from those previous, and the label carries with it collective memory in the form of narratives



performed and reinforced through commemorations and symbols (Connerton 1989). As people travel, their identities travel with them, transcending political and cultural borders. Over time, these narrative inheritances change, and are lost or exchanged for other treasures. **Collective identities connect the local scale, where we reside alongside our friends and neighbours, with larger movements, causes and concerns.** They make the wider world intelligible, alive, and urgent—expanding our spheres of reference to communities far beyond those we physically inhabit. **In modern democracies, identification and recognition are sources of legitimacy for political and economic institutions.** Their legitimacy depends in part on the presence or absence of a collective identity that is shared among citizens. This inquiry therefore proceeds from the assumption that **the question of identity, and specifically of European identity, is an existential issue for the EU.**

European identity is a mode of belonging that is practiced throughout a lifetime as well as ascribed at birth. How do EU citizens come to identify themselves as ‘European’? In what ways are expressions and performances of Europeanness shaping and informing current debates surrounding the Future of Europe? Implications drawn from ethnographic research of European identity among various communities for the Future of Europe suggest the need for a ‘cultural proliferation’ of novel initiatives which promote a positive, inclusive understanding of European identity and belonging—beyond the rhetoric of convergence criteria, stability mechanisms and bailout packages. The breadth and strength of a supranational community that Europeans can identify with has concrete implications for the future of Europe. **Our findings indicate the need for increased initiatives, programmes and campaigns which promote a positive European self-awareness at the member state and regional levels.**

As with related debates surrounding the identity and meaning of migration and citizenship in Europe, Brexit is an unfolding plot for which questions of Europe’s future, and what it means to be a European, are especially salient. At least as much as economic realities, **the Brexit affair concerns what it means to embrace, reject or passively disregard the idea of Europe. As such, it provides a useful case for our discussion, which departs from approaches that emphasize institutional development without sufficient regard for living socio-political identities.** The question of identity continues to matter in Europe and is likely to become more pressing in the future – hence the critical reflection on how the EU uses its symbols and cultural strategies to reflect such a shared belonging with which the paper concludes.

Context: The future of Europe

A corollary to the question of European identity is an ‘idea of Europe’ (Steiner 2015). In the EU context, this imagines a heterogeneous, supranational community of citizens existing over and above the member state level. The nature of the relationship between these levels—whether, for instance, they compliment or oppose one another—is question as old as the EU project itself. The Declaration on European Identity of 1973 notes that the European Community owes its distinctiveness to ‘the diversity of cultures within the framework of a common European civilization (European Community 1973). By one narrative, nationalism and the national is the original sin: the primary cause of 20th century bloodshed on the continent. At the same time, the EU’s progenitors saw European identity and belonging as something that would arise via ‘that same process which in an earlier period of



history produced our national forms of life' (Monnet 1978, 524). For Jean Monnet, the inexorable journey toward 'ever closer union' is cognitive as well as institutional: 'The European idea....is a deep and powerful movement on an historic scale... It has taken root in our people's consciousness, but it is slow to act on their will' (Ibid.).

The most recent Eurobarometer survey results report trust in the EU at 42% of Europeans, the highest level it has reached since autumn 2010. At a time when the benefits of EU membership seem distant, however, disaffection for European level actors and institutions remains a challenge. Despite rising above the 50% mark for the first time in 2019, voter participation in EP elections had been decreasing consistently after reaching its peak in 1979. That being said, falling trust in EU institutions may be derivative of falling trust in general. Indeed, in many countries EU institutions still fare better than national ones. An increasing majority of Europeans distrust national governments (61%) and national parliaments (60%). Moreover, evidence suggests that the baseline level of trust is influenced greatly by a person's position in the labour market: across European countries, citizens with more education and higher levels of skills express more trust in government than those educational and occupational groups that have benefited less from European integration (Foster and Frieden, 2017, 1). This suggests that, **rather than a lack of trust in the EU tout court, citizens distrust the direction of the European project, which has failed to address the continent's persistent and profound socioeconomic cleavages.**

Sixty years after Europe began its inexorable march towards the 'ever closer union of peoples', **however, a shared, pan-European consciousness remains conspicuously absent.** The lack of an extant European demos in the European Union means, in effect, a Europe without Europeans. In his 2016 SOTEU address, former Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker pronounced the EU to be in an 'existential crisis': 'I am convinced that the European way of life is something worth preserving. I have the impression that many [Europeans] seem to have forgotten what being European means' (Juncker 2016, 6). The critique that the EU lacks a European demos or populace poses a potentially existential threat to its democratic legitimacy as an institution of governance. According to former Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans, 'If the driving force of the European construction is national, cultural or ethnic identity, then it will not survive' (Lefranc 2016).

The putative absence of European identity and belonging on the continent has implications for the future of Europe. As its name suggests, **the European project is itself a process**, a work in progress. Unlike more traditional nationalisms which gaze back to an airbrushed past, **it is futurist in vision and orientation.** Looking into its future, however, what it sees is opaque: 'Where this necessity will lead, and toward what kind of Europe, I cannot say... I have never doubted that one day this process will lead us to the United States of Europe; but I see no point in trying to imagine today what political form it will take' (Monnet 1978, 523). The final act is left open-ended; there is a right direction but no certain destination. To be 'European' is to 'project oneself into a world which does not yet exist' (Abélès 2000: 35).

Leading up to the 2019 elections, national and European leaders engaged in dialogues on a future path for the Union. The White Paper on the Future of Europe, published by the Commission in March 2017, lays out five possible paths to finding a 'new identity' for the bloc by the end of the year (Valero 2017).



The citizens' consultations on Europe, an initiative proposed by French president Emmanuel Macron, are due to take place on the national and local levels, in cities across the new EU-27 later this year. The campaign aims to crowdsource proposals among European citizens for the possibilities of a 'rEUnaissance'. Such initiatives aim to reproduce Europeanness in its cultural dimension.

Europe Vs the EU – overlaps, disjunctions and implications for citizenship and identity¹

Imagining the EU as a fairly coherent territorial and legal entity is highly problematic given that, as Engin Isin and Michael Saward rightly point out (2013: 6), there is a myriad of European institutions with different reach and scope, and they all to some extent make up the Union. They also legitimise various aspects of what may be called European citizenship, which is at once broader and narrower than EU citizenship. On the legal side of things, there is the Council of Europe and its European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), with membership far exceeding that of the EU, and geographically extending far into Anatolia, the Caucasus and Siberia. Many issues pertaining to international security, human rights and democratic freedoms, including elections monitoring, are coordinated by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which reaches out even further than the ECHR and has members or partners on all inhabited continents. In 2010, the OSCE was chaired by the government of Kazakhstan.

As far as socioeconomic rights go, the picture is similarly convoluted though more spatially consolidated. First there is the EU itself, then the European Economic Area (EEA) that includes all EU member states as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. Beyond that we have the single market that covers the EEA and also includes Switzerland. The four non-EU single market states together form the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). Significant divisions also exist within the EU. The Schengen area, where there are no passport controls, excludes some of its member states, namely Ireland and the United Kingdom, as well as Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania, but includes all EFTA countries. The Eurozone, where the single currency circulates, also does not include many parts of the EU. At the same time, as the financial crisis in Greece exemplified, there is a clear and direct link between having the euro or not, everyday economic rights and citizens' woes, and their feelings of belonging to the EU. Finally, the EU has a complex network of governance, perhaps most powerfully signified by the policymaking duopoly of the European Commission and European Parliament.

An analysis of European identity in the context of the 'Future of Europe' debates runs the risk of conflating Europe with the European Union. Though the EU and its institutional predecessors have shaped the modern history of Europe, the two entities are not coterminous. Europe refers to something larger than the EU: "Europe as an institutional assemblage [is] irreducible to the EU" (Saward 2013: 220). Its social and cultural life extends well beyond the external territories of the EU-28. There are ways of identifying with Europe that orient the individual in opposition to the EU, or that disregards it altogether. The difference between the EU and European nation states is qualitative

¹ Parts of this section were previously published as: Jablonowski, Kuba (2017) You Don't Have Rights, You Use Them: Brexit and European Citizenship. The Sociological Review Blogs: <https://www.thesociologicalreview.com/blog/you-dont-have-rights-you-use-them-brexit-and-european-citizenship.html>



rather than quantitative, one more profound than simply the matter of the EU not involving all nation states that make up the European continent.

At the same time, Europe is used by the EU self-referentially and without qualification, remaining a piece of conceptual real estate to which it lays a claim. In official EU discourses, it is customary to use the two terms interchangeably. Operating on the European level, the EU institutions are the arenas where Europe is made, and reforms are discussed in terms of more Europe or less Europe. Similarly, the two concepts are near-synonyms for many citizens. In critically examining articulations of European identity and visions for Europe's future, it is nevertheless important to avoid taking for granted the assumptions underlying official EU discourses produced by institutional actors in the corridors of power, which seek to frame the conversation from above.

There is a strong argument claiming that such institutional and territorial complexity means that the EU is unlike any nation state, which has implications for both EU citizenship and identity. This may be in itself beneficial for European democracy for it ensures a multiplicity of voices in juridical, political, and socioeconomic debates (Amin and Thrift 2013: 135-156, cf. Isin and Saward 2013: 11-13), but multiple questions remain over the fragmented nature of EU citizenship and its impact on the formation of EU identities.

Only once we distinguish between institutional diversity and multiple forms of political rights claiming and belonging can we engage with the key question of the possibilities for a shared European identity, and the secondary yet intertwined question of the possibility of a European democracy without a clearly defined demos. For example, Isin and Saward (2013) argue that European citizenship is fundamentally national forms of citizenship, and therefore European democracy does not need a singular, sovereign and clearly defined citizenry and singularly defined identity. Saward (2013) in particular is sceptical of the idea that multiple republican and sovereign demoi are a necessary basis for cosmopolitan, European citizenship. He argues, more importantly still, that 'Europe' as an abstract idea significantly differs from the ideological foundations of any nation state.

For that reason, this argument holds that **while national democracies and identities may well require clearly defined borders, EU democracy and identity do not.** In many respects, the border between the inside and the outside of the EU is multifaceted, dispersed, and in some cases impossible to trace. On the issue of collective identity, consider the protesters flying EU flags in Kiev, Ukraine, in 2014 to defy their own government. Contrast this with the almost universal absence of the same flags in the UK during the EU referendum campaign of 2016, except as a negative symbol in much of the pro-Leave campaigning. What does this tell us about collective identity and belonging in the EU? In particular what does it say about the borders that lie between its inside and its outside, when those who are deprived of its political membership and socioeconomic rights are also those who seem to hold it most dear?

Identity as Performance

Following critical theorist and philosopher Judith Butler, **EU belonging will be understood as something that is performed, i.e. that is enacted through its affirmation.** Butler originally adapted



speech-act theory into a theorisation of the formation of gendered subjects, in view of which she discussed language as well as bodily practices and gestures (1993).

Broadly, the impact of Butler has been to affirm that identities (whether gender or of any other typology) are in flux – because so are its anchors. In other words, in this framework identity is seen as fundamentally contingent and stabilized via performative acts. That is to say that the context of the audience of the performative act helps determine which anchors take precedence over others at any given moment. The manner of how identity is performed becomes contingent on which anchors are exerting the strongest pull at that time. Additionally, the interplay between different anchors informs and helps define how the individual perceives and performs their identity at specific times and places. **Identity concepts are still the lens through which we perceive the world, but the lens may itself be in flux and the factors which fix it momentarily can vary.** In this view, **identity emerges as an active process of becoming.**

Although Butler's work on performativity began in gender studies, she subsequently expanded her understanding of the term. In the article 'Performative Agency' (2010), for example, the philosopher argues that the notion 'seeks to counter a certain kind of positivism according to which we might begin with already delimited understandings of what gender, the state, and the economy are' (p. 147). This points to the relevance of using the notion of the performative to investigate, for example, how broadly accepted narratives on certain political institutions emerge and are reproduced. More specifically, the essay discusses the processes through which the economical and the political have been kept apart, leading to the former's depoliticisation. In a similar manner, one can wonder how active a role the absence of a sustained effort to build and strengthen a sense of shared EU identity plays in the seeming depoliticisation of its project, and whether such policies could contribute to instigating a more progressive vision of the Union.

In other words, if identity is a performance, does the audience for whom it is performed co-define the characters' script? For example, looking at Remain campaigners during the Brexit referendum in 2016, did their sense of European identity shift when surrounded by fellow Remain campaigners, or when in conversation with a Leave voter? Did they pick up clues as to what "Europeanness" is and how it is demonstrated from the people they interacted with—in essence co-creating an identity in that time and context? What about EU civil servants and EU citizens? And what does this suggest in terms of the potential of progressive policies and programmes to create the necessary conditions for the performative emergence of a shared European identity?

Being European in the EU civil service

The European Commission is situated at a constellation of sites at which the regional, national and supranational levels of governance intersect. Its 33,000 officials arrive from every EU country. Upon joining the administration, each becomes a 'Union official' by taking an oath to work for the collective 'European interest', leaving their national allegiances at the office door. When officials reflect on what might form the basis for their Europeanness—why there are European, or what made them so—lived experience is especially salient. For many, being born into an international, multilingual family provided the fertile conditions for the development of a robust European outlook later in life. Many



are well travelled and have spent a year or more abroad. Studying at another European university or as an Erasmus student is often described as a transformative experience.

Commission officials see their personal European identities as the result of something acquired and developed over years: ‘It’s a question of experience. I mean, you can have a concept about it. But it’s always been like this. It’s something that is there if you want to experience it or if you want to live it’ (Giuseppe). Europe is a potential condition of experience to be had—one that exists out there in the world for those who wish to have it. Faithful to Sartre’s ‘existence precedes essence’ maxim (2007), European identity constitutes the product of action and experience, as opposed to birthplace, ethnicity or socioeconomic status. In this way, the making of the self as European disrupts ‘a very old and maybe obsolete perception of identity rooted in territorial grounds’ (Abélès 2000, 51).

And yet, the interviewees’ references to their foundational experiences as exchange students in European universities hints at the privileged socioeconomic background of those who are afforded the opportunity to experience Europe and hence identify as Europeans. While this is partly understandable – in that civil servants require highly technical skills and expertise that are developed in academia – the fact that **funded programmes of exchanges at EU level mostly focus on higher education suggests that opportunities to experience Europeanness also tend to remain closed to a limited few.** In many EU countries, these conditions have the effect of reproducing existing patterns of social inequality.

Among civil servants in the European Commission, European identity carries a multiplicity of meanings and differs from more familiar collective identities in compelling ways. While nationalisms trace their origins back to a nostalgic and mythical past, the European perspective gazes forward to an uncertain eventuality. As such, it is futurist in orientation. In parallel with the EU integration project itself, the idea of Europe envisions a society that is always in the process of becoming, of constructing itself.

Further, **officials perform Europeanness as a supranational mode of belonging that is complementary to, if not constitutive of, national belonging.** Though nationality and the national plays no formal role in the Commission, it remains highly visible during the informal discussions of the working day. Informants employ national categories and stereotypes in order to understand what it means to be European, often speaking of the latter in relation to their nationalities. A Hungarian national employed in DG CONNECT, for example, insists that the dynamic between her European and national identities is complementary, as opposed to antagonistic: ‘I think that the beauty of Europe is that—contrary to what many people like to say but it’s simply not true—it profoundly respects national identity’ (Zsófia). The tolerant, accommodating character that European belonging exhibits toward member states is affirmed in response to claims about EU integration as being a process by which nation-states vanish as Europe emerges. Against this, officials assert the complementary relationship bridging the European and the national with regard to their own experience of having multiple identities, and of observing the multiplicity of identity in others: ‘You’ve got to live with two identities. You have to feel at home in both’ (Richard). Recognizing the self as a multi-layered entity, officials inhabit a plurality of identities and a plurality of homes.

To the extent that European identity in the European Commission relates to an idea of belonging to a broader social project that stretches beyond the timeworn bonds of kinship, ethnicity and nationality,



it can be called a cosmopolitan orientation to the world. It would be misleading to claim however that this dimension of Europeanness can be captured with reference to a sense of rootlessness, as a majority of the interviewed officials are not reticent on the subject of their nationness, and the fondness they reserve for the city or region that will always remain one of their 'homes'. To quote the American poet Gertrude Stein, what good are roots if you can't take them with you?

When speaking of the EU's added value, officials take pride in the Single Market, an achievement which was largely a UK initiative. **Their attachments and allegiances to the Union run deeper, however, transcending concrete economic concerns** and reaching something nearer the spiritual. 'The economic union? But it's more than just that,' as one interviewee states. In formulating their orientations to the EU, 'people will use economic reasoning—people often use economic arguments, actually. But it's a shame that you have to use economic ones.' Such arguments invoke 'not the Europe of institutions and rules, but the Europe of the peoples at a human level.' As former Commission President Jacques Delors put it, 'you don't fall in love with a common market; you need something else' (Laffan 1996, 95).

As Commission officials view European identity as deriving from personal experience, they also see it as an esoteric disposition, uncommon outside of the 'Brussels bubble.' Jörg, a member of the Legal Service, has over time grown disillusioned with the notion of a pan-European demos or body politic: 'I liked it in the 1990s, but I don't buy it anymore. It's not realistic.' It is more accurate, he tells me, to talk of *demoi*, in the plural. 'People probably feel that the most important aspect of their identity is their national identity. You're concerned a bit about people in your home, in your own country more than others. So, it's national interest. It's your country, your people' (Marie-Christine). I am frequently reminded that these things take time. 'People forget the timescale needed to inculcate a kind of supranational identity. There's usually no problem in getting people to feel European if they're somewhere in another continent, that's fine. But feeling European, feeling a supranational identity when they are at home, that's more difficult' (Olivia).

To account for this, **officials point to a failure to establish direct channels of communication between EU institutions and EU citizens**. There are still no EU-level media outlets that reach significant audiences, while national media emphasise domestic issues and debates: 'As long as the first pages of the newspaper, and as long as the first minutes of the TV news will still massively be dedicated to domestic issues, you can say there is no such thing as a European demos' (Arnaud). When the European dimension is properly accounted for, EU bureaucracy doesn't seem to travel well. Reports in national broadsheets confine themselves to dry, technical analyses of legislative proposals or reiterate 'another boring press release' (Jörg). As a result, 'miscommunications, misunderstandings' ensue, and 'to the extent that [citizens] engage with politics, they engage with it at a national level' (Richard). The failure to establish a European public sphere, which proper pan-European discussions may be had, precludes the engaged development of supranational orientations among citizens. Consequently, relations with Europe are imagined as generally less direct, less relevant to their lives, lacking the salience and tangibility of national and regional identities.

Since Monnet's Action Committee for the United States of Europe, the EU integration process has been an almost entirely top-down, inorganic affair: 'something we owe in large measure to the



boldness and breadth of vision of a handful of men’ (Monnet 1978, 525). For over half a century, new elements of the European integration project were decided on, and citizens were notified about them after the fact. Speaking on behalf of 500 million people across the continent at once has meant that Commissioners have customarily served their terms without making frequent contact with citizens inside their immediate community, taking the time to share its activities. Indeed, officials are supportive of initiatives that foster direct, personal engagement that brings the EU closer to the realities on the ground. ‘It’s just the physical act of going somewhere and trying to meet people at the local level’ (Marie-Christine). Such engagements allow institutional actors to reconnect with citizens and shed light on the ‘added value’ the EU provides.

As the final section of the report will suggest, a robust programme of investment in exchanges and conversations at the grassroots level that would address existing patterns of inequality and inequity, for example in deindustrialized areas around the continent, could not only increase the visibility of the EU but also contribute to building or developing a sense of European demos beyond the scope of socioeconomic elites. In making this statement, we are suggesting that the S&D’s demand for the inclusion of a Social Protocol as an annex to the Treaties, aimed at ensuring that social rights take precedence over economic matters, should also take into consideration the importance of legislative instruments and investment measures that ensure the distribution of opportunities for EU citizens to co-produce a shared European identity. **Actively supporting the future of Europe demands replacing a belief in the miracle of the EU, to use an expression quoted before, with active policies that ensure identification – as well as bottom-up ownership – of citizens with the Union.**

Acting European, acting politically: Europeanness as a political device

While the above empirical reference draws attention to EU identity as a cultural construct that develops over time and through multivalent personal practices, **Europeanness also has a strong public and political dimension.** This process is especially salient since the EU has started “moving from issues of instrumental problem-solving to fundamental questions about its nature as a part-formed polity” (Laffan 1996: 82). **This section therefore seeks to explore how Europeanness becomes political through expressions of EU citizenship in the landscape of uncertainty created in the UK following its vote to leave the bloc in June 2016.** It draws on ethnographic work in Bristol, a core British city that predominantly supported the remain side in the EU referendum and, following its defeat, became a site of organising both against Brexit and in defence of the rights of EU citizenship.

Within days from the referendum there was unprecedented civic mobilisation in Bristol. On 28th June 2016, a rally was held on College Green opposite the City Hall and an estimated 2,000 people turned up. Some were European citizens holding their national flags: Bulgarian, Czech, Dutch, French, German, Polish, and others. On 10th July there was a smaller meeting initially aimed at the Francophone community in Bristol, organised by the French consular delegate Nicolas Hatton. At the last minute, Hatton extended it to involve all “EU citizens” whose rights would be affected by Brexit. Over 180 people turned up and while the majority of those who took the floor identified themselves as French, there were also people from Bulgaria, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and a Dutch-Somali community activist. The mood at the meeting was frantic with people sharing their stories of long-term residence or of recent arrival in Britain, but in all cases expressing anxiety about their future.



Many worried they would not qualify for permanent residence cards as these are only issued to qualified persons, that is those who meet the Home Office's stringent regulations (Home Office 2016) that implement the European Citizens' Rights Directive (Official Journal of the European Union 2004). There was even a widowed pensioner who, after living in Britain for over 50 years, worried she would not qualify given that her British husband passed away and she no longer had a job or private health insurance, an obscure requirement routinely used by the Home Office to turn down students, parents, and elderly applicants for permanent residence (Yeo 2017).

After this meeting the 3million campaign was formed, its name derived from the approximate number of EU migrant citizens living in Britain. It engaged tens of thousands through a Facebook-based online forum, which by the summer of 2017 grew to involve well over 35,000 members. It quickly attained media visibility as real stories of ordinary people being denied their residence rights gained prominence (O'Carroll 2016) and it also mobilised thousands to take action directly, with over 2,000 turning up for mass lobbies of Parliament in February and September 2017. The campaign highlighted the vulnerability of EU migrant citizens and anxieties they felt in the UK following the vote to leave. In the run up to the referendum, the Vote Leave campaign issued assurances about the continuity of EU citizens' rights. It stated that "there will be no change for EU citizens already lawfully resident in the UK. These EU citizens will automatically be granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK and will be treated no less favourably than they are at present" (Gove et al. 2016). However, such assurances did not become part of the UK government's initial offer or the subsequent proposals of the settled status for EU migrant citizens, which was neither an automatic process nor did it retain the full rights of EU citizenship (Home Office 2017). In what follows, the 3million campaign turned these unfulfilled assurances into a powerful claim about rights being violated and promises broken. At the same time, the 3million sought to maintain impartiality on party politics and on the issue of Brexit itself to assertively argue for citizens' rights.

The campaign was organised by concerned citizens who had very limited prior experience of political activity, and only on a local level. However, after the period of incubation in Bristol, it quickly started reaching far beyond the city. In January 2017 the group gave evidence to the Exiting the European Union Committee at the House of Commons. The following month, and in partnership with trade union Unison and campaign group New Europeans, the 3million organised a mass lobby of parliament attended by around 1,500 people, mainly EU migrant citizens but also British. After the Exiting the European Union Committee, the campaign built an alliance with British in Europe, a coalition of grassroots groups of UK residents living in EU27 countries, which strengthened its claim to EU citizenship beyond national borders. In March 2017 its representatives met the European Commission's negotiating team with its chief Michel Barnier in Brussels and gave evidence to the European Parliament in May. Another mass lobby and a rally in London were held in October 2017, still in partnership with Unison but this time also organised with British in Europe, who became the 3million's closest partner as both groups realised their lives became inextricably intertwined by the Brexit negotiations.

The campaign also maintained its engagement with the European Commission and Parliament through regular meetings after each round of negotiations between the UK and EU27, including with Barnier's deputy Sabine Weyand, and then again with Barnier personally in November 2017. At the



same time, it built a fragile working relationship with the Department for Exiting the European Union (DExEU) and the Home Office, although their repeated requests to meet their respective Secretaries of State – then David Davis and Amber Rudd – were not granted. The issue of EU citizens’ rights – both UK residents abroad and EU residents living in Britain – was included in the top three priorities for the first stage of Brexit negotiations. In this sense the campaign seemed effective, albeit it had another important consequence which is more important for this analysis: as one of its prominent early advisors and supporters put it during one of the national meetings of its activists in London, **“the 3million gave people a sense of agency”**.

Following the referendum this sense of agency was increasingly articulated through the notion of EU citizenship and EU identity; for example, the 3million’s first public rally in Trafalgar Square in London concluded with joint singing of EU anthem “Ode to Joy”. This was new given that the question of EU identity hardly featured in the referendum campaign. Crucially, the language and symbols of EU citizenship and EU identity were present in the 3million campaign from its very inception. What were the circumstances that made people think of themselves as EU citizens, then? Hatton, asked that question in an interview, thought it was the UK government’s refusal to confirm citizens’ rights in the weeks that followed the referendum:

“I think the refusal of the British government to grant Europeans the right to stay, that was the point [...]. People felt togetherness because together they’re refused that right to stay. And, as a result, it was not about being Polish or French or anything, it was very much all Europeans here, all European citizens – we can’t guarantee your rights. So, there’s this fact of you and them, or us and them.”

Hatton quickly realised that Brexit concerns were not just French concerns, and that all EU migrant citizens shared anxiety about Brexit. That was the reason why, three days before the event on 10th July, he changed its title and translated his invitation into English:

“I had this eureka moment in which I thought: ‘Well, it’s not just us, it’s all Europeans. It’s Italians, Polish, Spanish, Germans.’ So I changed it, I said to the speakers that they’ve got to speak English, not French.”

At the same time, activists from the 3million do not feel quite as strongly about their own Europeaness as the collective singing of “Ode to Joy” might suggest. One of them said:

“Definitely [I am] feeling European. But not as in, EU European. I’m very much like... you know, that’s my background, Western European. But from very early on I decided that nations would be restrictive, they create boundaries, and barriers, and borders...”

In this case, then, **the merit of EU identity is exactly its openness and haziness, which feels different and liberating in comparison to ethnic identity. The 3million activists also instinctively felt at ease with a complementary nature of EU identity**, perhaps because they all thought in our lives we



perform multiple identities anyway, and there is no particular hierarchy to it. Anne-Laure Donskoy, a founder member of the group and its co-chair, put it this way:

“I think we’re all, you know, one day we’re more this or we’re more that... It’s how you feel on the day and which bit of you kind of promote and in what context – context is key really. In the context of what I do for the 3million I am a European first, but if you’re asking me as me, I’ll tell you I’m all of these things all of the time and sometimes one bit will be, you know, more prominent, that’s all. I wouldn’t really put any weight on that.”

In this sense, **the emergence of assertive discourses of EU identity** channelled through the 3million campaign was a result of the vote to leave and subsequent decisions taken by the British government. As such, **it is a political process where identity is mobilised as a device to collectively claim rights from the state.** Of course it builds on pre-existing “personal, piecemeal Europes” but these are constructed in intimate and diverse ways.

Identity at one remove: European belonging as shorthand for cultural values

Whilst the impact of the Brexit vote on those who live and work in the UK by virtue of freedom of movement is obvious, what motivated those of British origin to campaign for Remain? After all the notion of a European identity has rarely faced a stress-test equal to that of the UK’s ‘Brexit’ referendum, in particular for those on the sharp end of it. **An exploration of the experiences of emotions of identity amongst those who campaigned for the various Remain groupings in the run-up to the vote** on Thursday 23rd June 2016 is likely therefore to demonstrate valuable insights into the concepts which surround European identity. To test this hypothesis, we designed a survey. It had 181 respondents varying in age, gender and geographical location and including respondents who associated themselves with all three main political parties and the Greens, as well as those who did not strongly identify with a specific party. It should be noted that respondents were predominantly living in England and supporters of either Labour or the Liberal Democrats. There were very few respondents from Northern Ireland. Despite this divergence there were several unifying factors which emerged from the responses.

The first was that even though the survey did not mention the European Union but only “European Identity” **every respondent conflated the notion of Europeanness with the EU.** This would then lead respondents to discuss two related areas – the interplay between ‘European’ identity and their national identity and the impact of the Brexit referendum on that interplay.

With regards to the interplay between European and national identities, there was a strong majority consensus from respondents – **91.71% agreed that they felt a sense of European identity and that this was additional to rather than in conflict with their sense of national identity.** This was particularly strong amongst respondents from the three Celtic nations who often used the parallel of feeling Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish and British and stated that they saw European as another level of identity in a similar vein.

There was a small minority of respondents – 4.97% – who stated they did not feel they had a European identity and that their reasons for campaigning for Remain were motivated by pragmatic or economic



issues rather than a sense of identity. A further minority – 2.76% – stated that they did feel European and that they felt that this was in conflict with their national identity. This was often expressed with support for the values and concepts they described as European and contrasted with perceived negative values and concepts they associated with expressions of national identity. Overwhelmingly therefore the main reason why campaigners chose to argue for a Remain vote was down to a sense of identity and belonging to the European Union. This was not seen as a replacement for national identity but, rather, an addition to it.

Respondents were however divided as to what the impact of the Referendum had been on their sense of identity, with some stating it hadn't changed their feelings of either European or national identity, some saying it had made them feel more European and/or less associated with their national identity and still others saying it had made them feel more conflicted about their identity. The referendum therefore shows that people's identities can be put into flux by events but that this is, in Butlerian terms, often by anchors coming into conflict with themselves. Anchors of one form of identity – Europeaness – which an individual had assumed signalled the same core beliefs as anchors of another form of identity – Britishness – suddenly coming into conflict with each other.

Whilst these findings were interesting in and of themselves, of greatest import was the second unifying factor amongst the respondents; namely the manner in which **they linked notions of identity not to physical institutions, places, communities or 'things' but almost universally to abstract concepts and values centred around themes of "openness", "tolerance", "respect for others", "multiculturalism", "progressiveness", "democracy", "rule of law", "solidarity", "decency" and "civilised behaviour"**. Although some respondents did refer to EU institutions or programmes (in particular the Erasmus student exchange programme) they were used as illustrative examples demonstrating notions or values which were then included under the spreading folds of the "European identity" umbrella. This also speaks to the concept above, that the anchors in play were thought to signify core beliefs.

In essence respondents corralled together a set of linked concepts and values which they would frequently refer to with the shorthand of "European". They then compared the perceived actions of self-declared "Europeans" and self-declared "non-Europeans" in the media and in person and made judgements based on how closely they believed the actions of the two groups matched the values and concepts they had identified previously. Thus it can be seen that during the Brexit debate 'Europeaness' was presented and taken as being a form of shibboleth, a catch-all password that placed the individual somewhere on either the liberal or progressive loci of the social spectrum and not as loyalty specifically to the European Union, except in so far as the EU was seen as the legal guardian and constitutional guarantor of such values.

When teasing out and interpreting this, Butler provides a useful guide from which we can begin to draw important lessons for notions of European identity. Specifically that the notion of identity in the sense of Europeaness has, to Remain campaigners, become adrift from the anchors of the institutions, geographical places and other physical signifiers of identity (if indeed they were ever attached) and instead become attached to anchors of values, ideas and ideals. This also means that the loyalty to a concept of Europe – embodied in the minds of respondents in the European Union –



is a second-hand loyalty. That is the primary loyalty people who responded to the survey feel is to the concepts, ideals and values associated with being “European” and only then at one remove to the EU as the perceived protector and promoter of those values.

This also implies a two-fold dark mirror in that there are two different fractions of Euroscepticism – on the one side a form which shows the EU as not living up to its own values – concepts such as the ‘democratic deficit’ – and on the other side a form which sees those values identified as European as being alien or distant from national values and as such in conflict with them or being imposed upon them – concepts usually couched in terms of sovereignty and immigration.

This is also evident in the manner in which certain respondents indicated they do not feel as though they are losing a sense of “Europeanness” but rather losing a sense of “Britishness”. Several mentioned they felt the Leave vote had shown that “Britishness” was not what they had thought it was, or that Britishness had been “stolen” from them by Leave voters. The evidence from above would suggest that by this they mean that the values which they identify with and considered to be markers of both Europeanness and Britishness are being removed, or attempted to be removed, from them.

The notion of European identity also provides a set of cultural touchstones which can be used as ‘shorthand’ for broader concepts of identity to do with values and ethics. **Europeanness acts as an identity ‘algorithm’ to package together a number of cultural and socio-political identity markers into one smaller shorthand.** This both helps and hinders fixing of identity in that it allows for individuals to identify what type of ‘audience’ they are amongst quickly and easily and also provides a ‘script’ for the performance of their identity in that moment. This is also the origins of how divisive the vote was, in that the rejection of the shorthand is perceived by those who voted and campaigned for Remain as the rejection of all the values packaged within it.

This presents a certain conflict for the promotion of Europeanness, in that combating the form of Euroscepticism which argues that the EU does not fulfil the ideals it espouses can lead to actions to affirm a certain cultural norm of what Europeanness is. This affirmation can then be taken by those who feel Europe is an invasive and alien culture as proof positive of that imposition. We attempt to address those concerns in the policy recommendations at the end of this paper.

Deploying Europeanness: identity as a legitimising institutional strategy

While the previous analyses examined how Europeanness is acted out by EU civil servants, activists and citizens, it is also important to understand how the Union’s own institutions perform such a shared sense of belonging. **Debates around European integration and the variables that explain public support for it often mention the EU’s communication strategy. However, authors rarely examine its deployment of official symbols or the role of its cultural strategy in this process** (Koopmans and Statham, 2010). This absence is particularly strange in the case of scholarship that considers the implications of the promotion of institutional activities by EU public communication officials in the inclusion or lack thereof of certain groups (Bee and Bozzini, 2013). This section aims to contribute to addressing this knowledge gap.

The goal of official symbols is to represent the values and the mission of an organisation. In the case of the EU, its symbols aim to convey the supranational character of the EU by suggesting an emerging



transnational identity. In doing so, they aim to strengthen levels of support for the EU, which are inversely related to stronger feelings of national identity (Carey, 2002). The European Union has four official symbols: the EU flag, the EU anthem, Europe Day and the EU motto. Let us briefly examine their details and their uses.

The EU flag

The flag of the European Union, composed of a circle of twelve five-point yellow stars on a blue background, is recognised as a symbol of both the EU and the Council of Europe. It was designed and proclaimed as a symbol by the latter in 1955 and, thirty years later, it was also adopted by the European Communities and subsequently by its successor, the EU. Nonetheless, the flag hasn't been officially recognised in any of the EU's treaties, The European Constitution was supposed to overcome this but failed to be ratified in 2005. Additionally, there isn't an official protocol that guides the uses of the flag.

In national contexts, national flags take precedence over the EU flag, which is displayed to its right; in meetings between EU leaders, this tends to differ. On other occasions it is flown alongside rather than above national flags (e.g. European Council meetings). Additionally, it is considered mandatory for the flag to be used in all official speeches made by the President of the European Council and at official meetings between the leaders of an EU state and a non-EU state. However, the use of the flag is often opposed by far-left and far-right political actors: for example, Marine Le Pen famously refused to be interviewed as a candidate to the 2017 presidential election if the flag were in the background and referred to its removal from heritage monuments in her manifesto, while left-wing radical Jean-Luc Mélenchon voted to have the EU flag removed from the French parliament.

Paradoxically, the contested character of the EU flag points to its strength as a symbol of Europeanness. If one understands the latter – as we have been suggesting – as a gradual process that emerges through daily practices and contestations, then the Union cannot be expected to have a universally accepted symbol. In other words, it's not fully instituted protocol points to a fundamental tension between the member states and the supranational elements of the EU, and to the rejection of the latter by Eurosceptics. However, at the same time, **its contestation also suggests the potential of the flag to become a catalyst for new cultural debates and activities, generating opportunities to discuss and reimagine the European project.** That is, the rejection of the flag by Eurosceptic forces can become an opportunity by progressives to make a pro-EU case and to strengthen grassroots support for it.

The EU anthem

The anthem of the European Union is an excerpt from the Ninth Symphony composed by German Ludwig van Beethoven between 1822 and 1824. The symphony's words are inspired by a poem written in 1785 by Friedrich Schiller, with additions by Beethoven, which mentions a joyful union among millions below the starred sky. The symphony is often described by experts as one of the best pieces of music ever composed.



The choice of classical music to the EU's anthem is consistent with the privileged socioeconomic background of its founders – indeed, as is well known, classical music tends to be a favourite cultural practice among elites. It isn't absurd to hypothesise that, had the Union resulted from organised bottom-up efforts, its anthem would have been in a different style.

This said, using as an official anthem a piece of classical music by a German composer is not directly in tension with either the values of progressives or with the idea of cultural diversity, suggested by the EU's official motto (see below). The problem lies in **the absence of regular institutional efforts by its institutions to make its appropriation by citizens and cultural producers a regular occasion**. This suggests a lack of understanding of the contribution of this official symbol to the perception of the Union as a closed (if not also elitist, and German-centric) project, and one to which only some belong.

The EU's motto

The official motto of the European Union, 'United in Diversity', is used as inspiration for the European Capitals of Culture. However, and **paradoxically, the focus of the many iterations of the programme and of the European funding and strategy on culture tends to reside on cultural differences rather than on what EU citizens share**. This absence is particularly significant in light of the identity-building goals of the Capital of Culture's programme, which enacts the motto (Sassatelli, 2014). Not only does such a focus on cultural diversity (often associated with the topic of intercultural dialogue) in the EU's cultural strategy fail to confront the nativist and exclusionary cultural narratives of the far-right (Dâmaso, 2018) but it also suggests that **the development of a shared European identity has not been at the top of the list of concerns of EU leaders and civil servants**. We expand on this absence below.

Europe Day

Finally, May 9th is recognised as Europe day, and is celebrated by opening European institutions to the public. The date was chosen to mark the anniversary of Robert Schuman's 1950 speech, which proposed political cooperation in order to prevent further war in Europe. Paradoxically, however, **the decision to open the institutions on this day suggests – or, rather, confirms – that they are in fact mostly closed to regular forms of participation from its citizens**, whatever EU official rhetoric might be.

Altogether, the symbols of the EU reflect its supranational mission. However, the way that the institutions deploy them isn't neutral. Rather than being used as a tool for dialogue and put at the disposal of the EU's citizens, **these non-inclusive references reflect top-down aesthetic and political choices. Although they aim to provide a symbolic legitimisation of the existence of the EU as a supranational entity based on an evolving transcultural community**, paradoxically they reflect how much is yet needed to achieve this goal. A progressive use of these symbols – inspiring dialogue and exchange throughout the continent and celebrating grassroots cultural practices and participation – could have an impact not only on the EU's visibility and perception on the ground but also in contributing to strengthening citizen ownership of its project.

The EU's cultural strategies



The EU has had the legal competence to act in the cultural domain since 1992. However, tensions between its institutions and the tendency of member states to privilege their own national interests have made the formulation and implementation of an European cultural policy extremely difficult. “Underlying problems originate in the failure to properly to define what is meant by ‘culture’ in different contexts or to identify clear and pragmatic policy objectives, although legitimate ‘instrumental’ use of culture is common” (Gordon, 2010, 101).

This is reflected in **the lack of ambition of the EU’s cultural strategies**. To give an example, the EU’s New Work Plan for Culture (2015-2018) had as its main goals the promotion of: accessible and inclusive culture, cultural heritage, the cultural and creative sectors, and cultural diversity. However, the explicit aim to address patterns of cultural inequity (which could have structured an ambitious programme of cultural activities to foster a sense of Europeanness throughout the continent) was limited to, first, audience development via digital techniques and, second, to reviewing public policies that can encourage cultural institutions to work in partnership with, for example, social care institutions.

This unambitious, if not limited, understanding of the potential of culture is also reflected in the New Agenda for Culture (2019–2022). Its main goals are to harness the power of culture and cultural diversity for social cohesion and wellbeing, to support jobs and growth in the cultural and creative sectors, and to strengthen international cultural relations. Yet the document limits the role of the EU in light of the first dimension of the strategy (that is, culture as a pathway to cohesion) to supporting the mobility of artists throughout the continent. In other words, **a social challenge is being addressed through individualistic policies. The result can only be failure.**

While the potential of culture to foster EU identity and belonging is recognised as important in many of these documents, this isn’t followed through with consistent policies. At the same time, resources tend to be directed to the growth potential of the creative industries without acknowledging the patterns of inequality that characterise the sector and its embeddedness in the economy. As a result of this, **EU cultural strategies may unwittingly reinforce existing patterns of inequality in terms of who produces culture, where this happens and what is defined as such.**

Rather, following the idea – which emerged in the previous sections – that identity building is an iterative, creative process, **progressives should recognise that all EU citizens are cultural producers of Europeanness**. Moreover, reflecting both the characteristics of the Union and the values of progressives, the latter should ensure that the governance of cultural programmes is inclusive and diverse.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the cultural dimension of the EU, an area neglected all too often in discussions on the future of the EU. Altogether, our findings highlight the need for progressives to acknowledge the difference between European citizenship (defined by its legal basis), belonging (which stresses a sense of individual ownership of the project) and identity (which requires an acknowledgement thereof by third parties).



Indeed, as a supranational mode of self-recognition and belonging, cosmopolitan Europeanness among civil servants in the European Commission carries a multiplicity of meanings and differs in composition from more familiar collective identities in compelling ways. Where the nationalisms that helped define the political landscape of the previous two centuries tend to be more concrete, emotionally-charged identities reinforced by exclusivist narratives, European identity emerges among EU bureaucrats as a relatively dispassionate, cognitively-oriented persuasion rooted in normative western liberalist values. Further, this supranationalism is futurist in orientation. In parallel with the integration project of the European Union, the idea of Europe is one of a society always in the process of becoming, of constructing itself.

Additionally, **our findings demonstrate that a sense of belonging can be fostered in specific contexts, which suggests that progressives can play a role in this process with appropriate policies and programmes.** For example, the EU's deployment of its official symbols could reflect a rejection of a top-down, unitary vision of the European project. Additionally, the rhetorical concern with European identity – shared by most policymakers and leaders on both sides of the political spectrum – should be translated into concrete policies and programmes. **More broadly, the idea of Europeanness identity must be proactively developed and enacted with people and in places beyond those that already support the European project. Identity cannot be built from the top-down.**

This is likely to be received with opposition from Eurosceptic parties and from member states such as Hungary and Poland, whose leaders have begun to question actions taken at the supranational level. Yet it is important to remember that fostering a sense of European belonging from the bottom-up, as late as it can be in the history of the Union, is precisely one of the ways to preclude increasing popular support for similarly Eurosceptic parties.

Given the particular challenges ahead, our priority should be a focus on communicating the EU's concrete instrumental advantages to citizens while recreating a feeling of EU belonging on the continent. Intensifying cultural conversations should take precedence. 'If I could do it all over, I would start with culture', is a line often attributed to Jean Monnet though is most likely apocryphal. Its implications are nevertheless as valid today as they ever were: namely that **approaches to integration which neglect the cultural dimension will always preclude pan-European unification and solidarity.**

In other words, although political discourse around identity often suggests singularity ('Europeans'), our findings suggest that its meaning varies and, crucially, emerges in different contexts. By changing the latter, progressives can contribute to strengthening Europeanness, increasing the Union's resilience. To do so, **Europeanness must be presented as being in addition to rather than as a threat to other forms of identity, specifically national ones.** This is particularly important because, by presenting itself as a community of communities, the EU can also become the primary place in which Europeans discuss what is meant by the word 'common' when we discuss a politics of the common good. Finally, altering the discourse to what core ideals Europeans have in common whilst simultaneously acknowledging and celebrating different ways of expressing those core values, will allow the European Union to reach towards those who may hold its values but do not necessarily package them with a European badge.



United in diversity needs to be not just the EU's motto, but also the manner in which the Union presents itself to, engages with, and is celebrated by its citizens.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, **we call for increased initiatives that affirm the realities of the European Union, of its integration project and of a transnational community of Europeans living on the continent.** Such projects would promote positive, inclusive understandings of European identity and belonging that go beyond the more technical rhetoric of press releases and news media articles.

1. Re-evaluate the language of progressives around identity

Our findings suggest that progressives should re-evaluate the assumptions of the vocabulary that they use in their communication and policies around identity. Ideas and policy proposals founded upon expressions such as ‘European civilisation’ (presupposing its supposed clash with other civilisations) and ‘British versus European identity’ suggest a static exclusionary understanding of identity that not only fails to correspond to reality but is also counterproductive in the long-term. This suggestion also applies to discussions around religion, which tend to focus on religious specificities rather than on how to build and sustain a shared, diverse community.

This recommendation translates into the following policy proposals:

- Replace static, zero-sum references to and discussions of identity with examples promoting a positive, inclusive understanding of European identity and belonging as a process of Europeaness. This applies to political rhetoric, the language used in communication materials, and policy proposals.
- Rethink the assumptions of cultural policies and all policies proposals that overlap with issues around identity. If they reflect nativist, exclusionary understandings of identity, transform them to reflect the values of progressives.

2. Increased initiatives that foster sociable interactions among Europeans

Erasmus, in its various incarnations, is widely regarded as the EU’s most popular initiative – hence its referral by several interviewees among the EU civil service. Over 3 decades, the programme has sent 3 million students to study abroad and produced an ‘Erasmus generation’ of countless inter-Erasmus marriages and a million ‘Erasmus babies’. Yet these students and individuals tend to originate from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds.

Building on this success, we need to enhance existing programmes, incorporating initiatives that facilitate intra-European mobility with a particular focus on addressing unequal access to EU-funded programmes. Initiatives that galvanize youth mobility, such as the free Interrail travel passes soon to be made available to EU citizens on their 18th birthday, represent a positive move in this direction – although, yet again, a serious concern with ensuring equality of access to them is yet to be shown by the EU. As access to higher education is accessible to a limited percentage of EU citizens, paid opportunities for sociable interactions among individuals not in education, such as vocational training or volunteer work should also be considered.



Specifically, this recommendation translates into the following policy proposals:

- Ensure that the socioeconomic background of the participants in Erasmus and similar programmes is taken into consideration in the selection process, prioritising the least privileged
- Focus investment in intra-European programmes of exchange, such as the European Voluntary Service (higher and further education, vocational training, volunteer work...) outside urban and economic centres – e.g. deindustrialised regions

3. Expanding the Social Pillar to Include Culture

In accordance with the subsidiarity principle, education and culture policies are decided by member states; the EU's role is merely supportive. And yet education is mentioned in the list of 20 principles included in the Pillar of Social Rights (structured into three themes: equal opportunities and access to the labour market; fair working conditions; social protection and inclusion), but culture isn't. This suggests a mistaken assumption: that inequities and exclusion can be addressed by the labour market and by socioeconomic policies alone. If progressives fail to acknowledge and respond to cultural anxieties in the face of a changing world and, increasing precarity and uncertainty, others will.

This recommendation translates into the following policy proposals:

- Expand the list of social services to which everyone has a right (included in the Pillar of Social Rights) to cultural activities.
- More broadly, pledge to embed a concern with patterns of inequality in the distribution of funding to the cultural sector – namely, via the spatial distribution of funding and by prioritizing projects with strong elements of participatory governance as well as small-scale projects embedded in local communities.

4. Extension of Citizens Consultations into the next election cycle

New forms of debate are needed to strengthen participatory democracy and demonstrate the ways in which EU actors and institutions are delivering on the promise that we are 'better together'. As we prepare for the 2019 European elections, getting citizens more engaged in the democratic process is a key commitment. To achieve this, it is necessary that representatives and policymakers demonstrate a willingness to engage constituents in direct dialogues on issues they care about, taking into account the European dimension of the challenges we face. Only by boosting democratic engagement at the grassroots-level can we begin to address the primary drivers of voter dissatisfaction that fuel support for populist and authoritarian interests.

Specifically, this recommendation translates into the following policy proposals:

- Commit to extending the Citizens Consultations initiative under the Future of Europe debates beyond the 2019 European elections. Citizens' proposals presented during these discussions should be curated and forwarded to decision-makers both before and after the election.



- Invest in more citizens' consultations programmes throughout Europe at the regional level, ensuring diversity of participation
- Initiate a transnational public vote on citizens' proposals, selecting ideas to be taken forward by the EU's institutions



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