

The International Spectator 1/2003

## Book reviews and Notes

---

# On the Search for a European Identity

John Erik Fossum

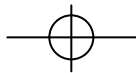
*A soul for Europe : on the cultural and political identity of the Europeans / edited by Furio Cerutti and Enno Rudolph. - Leuven ; Sterling : Peeters, 2001. - 2 v. (xv, 223; xv, 227 p.) Vol. 1: A reader; xv, 223 p.; ISBN 9042909951; Vol. 2: An essay collection; xv, 227 p.; ISBN 904290996X*

The purpose of this two-volume book is to foster public debate and scholarly research on the question of European identity. This intention resonates very well with contemporary events and developments in Europe. The possible effects of the integration process are so deep that there is no escaping the question of what Europe's "soul" is, and what kind of identity Europe can draw on in the future. Through the Convention on the Future of Europe, the EU has embarked on probably the most open and comprehensive discussion on Europe's soul and the question of European identity ever undertaken. The

Convention has built up a momentum but not reached any definite conclusions on this critical issue. Consider, for instance, the response to the first articles of the Constitutional Treaty proposed in February 2003, which contained around 1087 amendments to the first 16 articles of the Treaties.

These developments certainly heighten the topicality of a comprehensive two-volume book on European identity. The volumes came out in 2001 and thus before this debate took off. But the book could still help shed light on these important discussions. To what extent does it do so? The questions pertaining to European identity are legion. How do we and how should we understand and conceptualise identity? What are the sources of identity? What are the modern requirements in terms of attachment and allegiance? Are the contemporary requirements the same as those of the past or are they different? If different, in what do the differences reside? On what

\* John Erik Fossum is Senior Researcher at the Institute for Advanced Research on the Europeanisation of the Nation State (ARENA), Oslo.



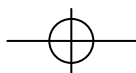
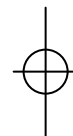
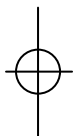
## 116 On the Search for a European Identity

is the European Union based? Is it and should it be an economic type of organisation? Does it rest on a common European culture? Does it have a shared value base? If so, how unique to Europe is this? Or is European identity better thought of as a set of multiple identities and the proper metaphor one of concentric circles? Can Europe develop a soul? What would the main building blocks be? How far do fundamental rights and democratic institutions extend within such a pursuit?

This two-volume book is not confined to an assessment of the European Union's attempts to instil a sense of European identity or Europeaness. The collection takes a much broader look. It addresses the question of European identity by discussing the cultural, social, economic and political aspects, and by focusing on historical and contemporary aspects. The first volume is intended as a general reader, specifically designed for those who are not specialists or particularly familiar with the European integration process. The second volume is intended as a companion to the reader and consists of more specialised essays on a range of topics, both intra-European and dealing with the role of Europe in the world. This approach makes it possible to address, at least in a sketchy manner, the questions listed above (and a range of related ones).

The editors underline that the book is not intended to offer policy advice. This should not be considered a limitation. Even the Convention's debates can become myopic and declaratory, focused as they are on the structure in place and with speaking time greatly limited.

The two volumes contain contributions from a number of the key participants in the debate on European identity. The preface is by Vaclav Havel. In his comprehensive introduction to the first volume, Furio Cerutti underlines that "European identity is not going to be the great equaliser of national identities, and we should not fall into the mental trap of looking at European identity formation just as a rerun on a larger scale of what national identity-building did in Europe to local and regional cultures." (Cerutti, vol.I:1) Cerutti emphasises the need to distinguish between political and cultural identity. He then discusses why there is a need for a "European soul" and links this to the vital issue of democracy and legitimacy. His argument is framed in the spirit of constitutional patriotism. The subsequent chapters offer several other important contributions to the debate, some of which embrace this orientation, others of which do not. The debate reflects the unique character of the present-day EU as a non-state entity. One of the most important contributors to the debate, Joseph Weiler, lauds the EU for not having chosen the federal state option. Instead, he speaks of Europe's *Sonderweg*, and locates the normative underpinning of the European federal non-state arrangement in the principle of constitutional tolerance. It is an attempt to strike a precarious balance, in which the onus is more on respect for and accommodation of diversity than the forging of commonality. This principle has associations with Charles Taylor's notion of "deep diversity". Richard



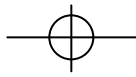
Bellamy and Alex Warleigh argue persuasively for the need to develop further European citizenship as a means for rectifying the democratic deficit. Their view is that it is possible to forge a third way, between communitarianism and cosmopolitanism. They label it cosmopolitan communitarianism. It is more accommodating of diversity than the communitarian cosmopolitanism that the authors derive from the Amsterdam Treaty and that they link to constitutional patriotism. How this term properly reflects Habermas' constitutional patriotism is not clear.

In their incisive contribution, Mario Telo and Paul Magnette trace the historical roots of the particular European approach to solidarity and how it is linked to social justice. They identify three sets of roots: socialism, social liberalism and Christian democracy. The question is whether the European institution of the welfare state can be maintained in a more globalised world. They see the Union not as an affront to solidarity but as a possible vehicle for reform and continued sustenance of the welfare state, albeit in different shape. Guy Haarscher talks of the particular European approach to reconciling liberty and rights, with several interesting and revealing examples. He reminds us that peace is closely related to liberty and that "(t)here is no other example in history of a process leading to a partial weakening of sovereignties that is not violent or imperial". The focus is on the European Court of Human Rights and it would have been interesting to have more on the EU's own development of fundamental rights, in particular given

its increased emphasis on this through the Charter on Fundamental Rights (whilst formally a political declaration, it has already become a source of legal interpretation).

Furio Cerutti speaks of the importance of developing a shared European attitude towards peace and war – one of the thorniest issues facing Europeans – as a critical component of a European identity. The war experience, he rightly reminds us, is itself an important source and impetus for a European feeling of commonality. Remi Brague discusses the difficult issue of where Europe's borders are. Among several important observations, he rightly concludes that culture cannot delineate the Union's borders. Enno Rudolph looks at what we might learn from previous attempts to develop European identity, in light of the 1989 experience. He notes that "[i]n the last decade, Europe has had to learn to combine the contingency of its possible rediscovery with the necessity of self-definition." (1:147). In the last chapter of volume I, John Fitzmaurice gives a useful overview of the EU in structural-institutional terms.

The second volume has an incisive introduction by Enno Rudolph and interesting contributions by Hendrik J. Adriaanse on the role of religion; Moshe Barasch on the iconoclastic debate in Europe; Barbara Henry on the role of symbols; Gøran Therborn on Europe and the question of modernity; Ann-Kathrin Hake on inner-European migration; Frank Pfetsch on the role of culture; Dimitri D'Andrea on the tension between Europe and the West; Srdjan Vrcan on civil society; John Michael



## 118 On the Search for a European Identity

Krois on the difference between European culture and the European elements of US culture; and Javad Tabatai on the case of Persia. Therborn's contribution is particularly valuable.

The contributions in the two volumes do not form a coherent whole. Their quality is also variable. But the book serves a purpose. It is probably one of, if not the most comprehensive exercise to help us develop and take stock of the present situation. It serves as a useful reminder of the complex and multifaceted nature of the problem of forging a European identity. This challenge is complex precisely because the EU is different from other established entities and because solutions must be found within a setting marked by a significant "cosmopolitan leakage" and wide European divergences.

Further, the book also serves to

explain why such an effort is needed.

Some common threads run through the contributions. One is that we cannot rely on a common European culture for such an effort. The forging of a European identity and soul is a quintessentially political project. That leaves it up to us to forge the Europe we need and want. Another clear underlying thread is that solutions can only be identified, and eventually developed, insofar as they are linked up with and informed by political theory.

The next step should be to continue to weave together the different factors identified here into a clearer tapestry of meaning. That would require further intellectual efforts and political-ideological choices, so as to hammer out a clear theoretical and normative project. Recent developments in Europe emphasise the need for such a further undertaking.

