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“Creating a European Identity

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The House of European History”

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Introduction

In the mainstream scholarly discourse on European integration, cultural integration has for the longest time taken a backseat. Usually, when referencing the ever closer unity of the (still) twenty eight member states, it happens through the signing of yet another political or economic treaty (McNamara 2015, Demossier 2007, Shore 2000). Alas, Robert Schumann's understanding of a "de facto solidarity" (European Parliament 2018) resonates with the majority of integration literature, which views a European identity or common understanding as a by-product - rather than actively pursued achievement (Shore 44). A common identity will 'just' happen along the way.

Fact is, though, that the now more than ten crisis-ridden past years in the European Union -first through the financial crisis, later through the refugee crisis - have demonstrated that the conception of de facto solidarity or in general a common sense of belonging are either missing, or they are dispersed throughout the various member states unequally with different understandings and expectations. Discourses over the inability to 'fix' their problems ultimately revert back to the discussion over whether there are common values and ideas amongst the member states and -more importantly their citizens -that trump self-interest (Vincenti 2018).

As President of the European Commission in the 1980s, Jacques Delors frequently argued that "you cannot fall in love with the single market" (CVCE 2012), the elite political unit in the European Union (EU) has long recognized that the citizens of the EU will not wake up one day and simply feel solidarity with their fellow EU compatriots. Constituting of twenty eight members, whose history and legitimacy have been founded on the concepts of ethnic nationalism and the creation of clearly specified "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983), the EU is facing an uphill 'battle' when it comes to creating social cohesion amongst its public mass (Risse 27).

The creation of a common European identity has and will require “bureaucratic intervention” (Shore 52). Even, though, an actual definition of what constitutes such European identity is essentially non-existent (Shore 52), I will demonstrate that at the EU institutional level - amongst the political elite- a conception of what European identity should look like has been formed. If not formed, then at least the realization has been made, that active efforts have to be made in order to ensure a stable future for the political, economic, and social realm of EU governance.

While the idea of inventing symbols and traditions in order to facilitate a common narrative/common culture of one people is not innovative, the European case adds an additional layer to the discourse. As Cris Shore (2000) argues and Kathleen McNamara (2015) elaborates, the institutional narrative creation at EU level has been happening since the early 1990s in an innocuous way. Shore and McNamara name numerous examples that illustrate how EU symbols have been affecting, and therefore socializing, its citizens on a day-to-day basis with inconspicuous artefacts. Those include, for instance, the EU flag, the EU anthem, the use of euro bills, or the use of EU certified products. While not obvious, the daily usage perpetuates a practice, normalizing the EU in the consciousness of its citizens (Shore 2000, McNamara 2015).

McNamara calls this type of cultural foundation building a form of “banal authority” (2015). It implies a permissive consensus from the member states, which the EU enjoyed in the political and economic realm until the early 1990s, and which has in the cultural realm continued on till now. So far, these smaller symbolic changes ‘here and there’ have not been attempting to override or replace national forms of identity. Rather, they are trying to be complementary and fill voids were needed (McNamara 2015, Demossier 2007).

Culture cannot be viewed as “secondary” to the discussion on European integration (Demossier 2007). It needs to be understood as a basis for how people act, behave, and form opinions about matters (Ross 2000). As Demossier argued, “Culture is a framework for organizing the world, for locating the self and others in it, for making sense of actions and interpreting the motives of others, for grounding and analysis of interests, for linking collective identities to political actions and away from others” (51). Such an understanding is key for understanding the efforts of the EU to solidify its claim and desire for political legitimacy from its constituents (McNamara 2015).

Looking at the example of the House of European History I will illustrate that the EU has taken advantage of the permissive consensus in the cultural integration realm. The museum is a manifestation of an institutionally driven narrative, which constructs a common history and culture of the EU member states to foster a sense of belonging and to define what it means collectively to be European (Demossier 2007). In doing so, the EU has stepped out of the symbolic shadows of the permissive consensus. It is now actively using the tools of nationalism to advance an ideology in order to ensure aforementioned stability, and to allow for future political and economic integration to take place.

In my paper I will illustrate two specific aspects. One, I will illustrate that this museum is an institutionally driven creation. The EU has given itself the competency to advance cultural projects. Cultural integration and the harmonization of a community cannot happen at any other level of power/jurisdiction. I will then embed this conversation in the nationalism and museum literature, highlighting its performative function. I will elaborate on the discourse of cultural integration in the EU through my case study of the House of European History.

Methodology

This paper will be primarily an in-depth case study of the House of European History. My two main primary sources will be my own field notes and images taken on my own visit to the museum in August 2018 as well as the book *Creating the House of European History*, which is published by the museum itself and contains a detailed account on the creation as well as providing personal testimonies by people involved in the process. A lengthier research process would involve the attempt to speak personally to key actors, and not solely have to rely on their provided texts. I will create a picture of what the museum on its surface is trying to convey to its audience. In particular, though, I will illustrate through a brief historical analysis the extent to which the European Parliament has taken the lead on this cultural project, leaving behind the member states themselves and thus acting in a supranational fashion.

Literature Review

The literature review is divided into three sections. Primarily I will discuss integration literature to show that cultural integration, as a supranational objective, makes most sense in the historical institutionalism literature. Additionally, I will address identity literature to highlight the overarching importance of providing a cultural foundation in the EU. Lastly, I will briefly touch upon the key staples of nationalism literature to highlight the importance of strategic choices by the political elite.

Discussing integration in the EU usually involves an assessment of who is pulling the levers in the process - either the member states or the supranational institutions themselves. None of the integration 'templates' have cultural first and foremost on their mind. Cultural integration is defined by the harmonizing of values and ideas to create a sense of belonging that would

justify political legitimacy and authority for its institutions, which none of the classic integration theories can adequately explain of how it happens (McNamara 2015). A review of them shows that historic institutionalism best illustrates and explains the rise for cultural integration at the EU level.

Neofunctionalism explains the rise of federal institutions by arguing that in certain instances transnational political groups will see the benefits from jointly working together. Ernst Haas argued that a “spill over” - effect would occur from one area of interest to the next if the impact of the integration process is meaningful enough. Haas additionally articulated that certain conditions for community formation are more beneficial than others. He concluded based on those conditions that the European continent lend itself well to this type of integration (Haas 2014). Haas spoke in his theory of integration predominantly of industries, explaining the lack of cultural projects organically coming up. Cultural harmonization benefits the larger overarching process, because it can make processes smoother and more flexible (i.e. the spillover effect). Yet, to argue that individual sub-supranational political groups will push for similar goals seems infeasible and outside of their realm of pursuing interests.

Intergovernmentalism has even less of an explanatory value for existing cultural integration, as this theory predominantly argues that when it is economically beneficial for member states to cooperate, they will do so (Moravcsik 2014). The member states willingness to cooperate, to surrender certain sovereign qualities, and to liberalize their markets is driven by self-interest to become competitive in the international market. They are able to withdraw from any agreement and regain their sovereignty in full if it no longer serves their purpose (Moravcsik 2014). To explain cultural integration through the economic self-interest of member states is a stretch, because the whole purpose of cultural integration is to harmonize ideas and narratives

that can be counterproductive for a sovereign state. Agreeing to such processes seems unlikely if the sole focus is on a state's self-interest. If the states were truly able to pull out at any given time, cultural integration steps that have already been taken, should not exist in the first place.

Hooghe and Marks argue for the uniqueness of the EU project, saying that states are no longer solely in charge. Rather, decision-making power is dispersed over various levels - all the way from the supranational level to the lowest subnational governmental levels. A simultaneous process of decentralization and centralization is happening in the European Union, according to the two authors (Hooghe, Marks 2001). This theory, insofar, expands on the notion of integration, as it no longer views it as a zero-sum game between the supranational institutions and the nation-states. While it also discusses integration more in material terms, cultural integration could be viewed as a competence at the supranational level in this conception (Hooghe, Marks 2001). Its harmonization aspect, nonetheless, would have to supersede whatever actions would be taken at the lower levels to achieve its intended goal, countering the notion that jurisdictions are split up over various levels.

Bickerton argues that EU integration is puzzling insofar as the behavior of member states does not reflect traditional behavior expected from nation-states. They do not operate solely out of self-interest. Rather, one should rather look at how EU institutions have shaped nation-states into member states, which - so Bickerton - are two different concepts (2013). Paul Pierson's argument of historical institutionalism fits well with Bickerton's argument, and explains best the cultural integration in the EU, which has been initiated by EU elites.

The reason why cultural integration is possible at the EU level, in my understanding, is because the EU institutions have taken over the realm of cultural formation, as "gaps emerge in member-state control over the evolution of European Institutions and public policies" (Pierson

126), which are difficult to close and allow other actors - in this case EU institutions - to take over and implement policy changes that affect the member states and the institutions themselves (Pierson 126). If states were truly in charge of the integration process, as intergovernmentalists will argue, they should be able to identify and fill these gaps easily. Historic institutionalism observes the larger integration process, instead of just focusing on key moments to argue about integration (i.e. treaties) (Pierson 1996).

Pierson articulates three reasons why member states are not capable or unwilling to close the gaps in integration and why they then allow other to swoop in. One, as supranational actors grow in size and power over time (i.e. Commission, Parliament, etc.) they develop own resources and ideas, which they are not willing to budge on. Two, decision-makers - the states - lack the power to actually continuously control the institutions, as governments come and go. The rules of the game have been set up in such a way to counter any possible drastic overturns, and as the new policies are enacted the *acquis communautaire* continues to grow. And three, with each continuing policy and action the sunk costs are becoming too high to simply allow the member states to exit or drop a project. Pulling out could potentially, for instance, harm the single market economy all member states engage in (Pierson 1996).

European Identity – as an emerging gap – can only be filled by the EU, as they necessitate an emerging identity. Identity needs to be understood as a “relatively large group of people characterized by a sense of social/cultural and historical unity and a desire to live together” (Thiesse 16). The literature differentiates between various types of identity, but generally it is always about how to define in- and out-groups (Risse 28). Risse separates between primordial (biological, static), sacred (there is a chance to find the “truth”), and civic identity (which is less negative in its understanding of out groups) (Risse 28-29). Demossier echoes the

understanding of essentialist (primordial) identities, but then she only adds a constructed identity to that (Demossier 53). They can appear as such, but this perception is incorrect. Primordial conceptions of identity ignore the fact that culture is non-static, constantly evolving and being reconstructed (Wedeen 2002, Risse 29) I would argue, leaning on nationalism literature, that any identity is constructed and that a conception of some innate qualities is fiction.

Risse explains why a common identity based on culture in the EU is even necessary. He argues that “mutual knowledge about membership in social group” (22) is important for understanding one’s own social identity and one’s connection to the group at large. It cannot be solely based on facts, as I would argue big ticket items like treaties are. Social identity is based on emotional attachment, as said attachment creates loyalty, which carries with it “behavioral consequences” (Risse 22), meaning that an emotional connection to a group can impact how people view that group and how they respond to it. Risse further argues that this loyalty maintains existing structures (22). This understanding of the importance of cultural integration manifests its importance for any further EU projects (of any kind) to work, loyalty needs to be implemented. Risse, additionally, elaborates that identity is not a zero-sum game. One is capable of having loyalty to multiple identities. He differentiates how identities can co-exist: separate (no overlap), cross-cutting (in certain areas), nested in one another, or the “marble-cake” version, in which identities blend into one another without a specific structure. He understands the EU identity and citizens’ individual nation-state identities as such (Risse 24).

Political elites will construct identities to connect to their audience. The foundation of this identity doesn’t even have to be real; it just needs to be perceived as such (Risse 23). Symbols of all kind contribute to that (Risse 23, McNamara 2015). Yet, stories -collective memories- are the holy grail in identity formation (Vinnen 2007). Memories are based on a

particular perspective of common history, a common language, a common landscape, and the promotion of monuments (Thiesse 19-20). Smith argues that the longer a specific form of an identity exists (remains uncontested), the more likely it is to remain stable (1991). Shaping a specific identity takes time (Thiesse 16). Risse argues that there are two ways in which identity changes: either gradually, which can happen through institutional change and/or emotional appeals, which actively promote a specific narrative, or rapidly due some crisis (i.e. World War 2 or the collapse of the Soviet Union) (Risse 31).

In general, though, any definition attempts of specific group - identity forming -does carry the likelihood of being challenged (Risse 26). Contestation is key in solidifying, which the EU has largely been trying to avoid in the past with its harmless symbols (McNamara 2015). The museum does appear a bold move in the identity formation process, as Risse argues that the more political elites will remind their audience of a common ancestry, the more likely it is that resistance will come up (Risse 29).

The creation of an identity at any level cannot be described in any other way than as the creation of nationalism. Benedict Anderson described nationalism as “imagined communities” (Anderson 6). He is not the only to understand nationalism as a purely artificial construct (Anderson 1983, Gellner 1983, Hobsbawm, Ranger 1984). An imagined community has three distinct features: an individual will never know all members of this community, there are boundaries to the community, and the community as such has sovereign powers (Anderson 1983). While initially, with the decline of religions and empires as unifying factor in groups, nationalism was pushed for by non-state actors mostly through language consolidation (i.e. capitalists, intellectuals, people living in exile), it eventually became a competency of political elites - in particular the state - to promote a certain narrative, as they had either the capacity or

autonomy to invoke tools to legitimize their political agenda - as they recognized how useful of a tool it is to harmonize a larger group with commonalities (Anderson 1983, Gellner 1983, Hobsbawm, Ranger 1984). Demossier agrees with this conception as well when it comes to the EU, as she identifies it as an authoritarian/elite driven project (53).

Language consolidation is inconceivable at this stage in the EU in the integration progress (the institutions have yet to gain that much power). The seminal literature highlights additional tools that have been appraised as important and effective in pushing a certain narrative: mass-media, mass-communication, standardized education, the creation of monuments, and the implementation of museums. They all contribute and perpetuate a state approved narrative on how the nation is supposed to be conceived (Anderson 1983, Gellner 1983, Hobsbawm, Ranger 1984).

Case study: The House of European History

On February 13th, 2007, then President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Poettering, issued in his inaugural address to the Parliament a wish to create a “House of European History” (Mork, Christodoulou 11). His goal was to create an institution that encapsulated the “memories of our shared history” (Mork, Christodoulou 11). Ala Lisa Wedeen (2002) and her understanding of ever evolving cultures and identities, so did Poettering understand the conception of the European identity presented in the House of European History (HEH) in his speech, as he hoped for the HEH to be for to be a place where “the European identity to go on being shaped by present and future citizens of the European Union” (Poettering 2007). It is important to note that even though Poettering suggests a museum about European

history, he inadvertently makes the immediate connection to the European Union, even though, these two concepts are not necessarily overlapping.

While Europe is populated with (national) museums, up to that point no one museum in Europe had solely been dedicated to Europe and its history itself, so Andrea Mork, who is the head curator of the HEH (Mork, Christodoulou 129). Prior to Poettering's initiative there had been talks ever since the 1970s in the European Parliament and the Commission itself to create a similar institution, yet they fell on deaf ears (Mork, Christodoulou 12, Vovk van Gaal, Dupont 2012). In 1997 a Museum of Europe, led by historian Krzysztof Pomian, was not able to secure sufficient funding for it to expand beyond its initial four exhibits (Jares 2017). In 2006 an ambition museum project titled "Bauhaus Europa" was put up to a referendum to the citizens of Aachen, Germany, where the museum was supposed to be located. Ultimately, the results of the referendum brought an end to the project (Baunetz 2006). Lastly, the city of Marseille, France, opened in 2013 the doors to the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations. This museum does not encompass the entire geographical scope of Europe but is rather limited in the parts of the continent included in the narrative. The HEH is the first museum of its caliber to make it successfully beyond the planning and funding stages, while at the same time encompassing a pan-European scope of interest (Jares 2017).

Poettering saw the necessity for the museum, as he wanted to reinforce the purpose (peace) of the European Union in its citizens' minds. In his understanding, the normalization of the European Union and the prolonged period of peace on the continent had led to a collective forgetting and a collective casualness (Mork, Christodoulou 18). By illustrating the key civic values of the European Union (human dignity, freedom, democracy, rule of law, peace, and principles of solidarity and subsidiarity), Poettering was hoping to get citizens more involved in

the European project (Mork, Christodoulou 11). Acknowledging the problem of competing narratives on a continent, which has been defined by and fought battles over its distinctive national narratives, Poettering hoped for a highlighting of commonalities through the motto of “unity in diversity” (Mork, Christodoulou 11), and, therefore, “deepening their knowledge [*all generations*] of their own history” (Mork, Christodoulou 28).

In 2008, the planning stages of the project took off, led by the Bureau of the European Parliament. A team of experts released in October of 2008 the *Conceptual Basis for a House of European History*, which was a 116 point memo, depicting in detail how the museum should look like, what message it was going to send, and what historic time periods should be focused on. This memo was also the inspiration for the subsequent bureaucratic structure of the HEH (European Parliament 2008). In 2009, the European Parliament began approving certain aspects of the project, which would ultimately be solely funded by the Parliament itself. In 2011, the Academic Team was hired, overseeing all key aspects of a museum visit experience. That same year, the French architectural firm Chaix & Morel was hired to work on the project. With an initial goal of opening its doors in 2015, the museum eventually opened its doors on May 6th, 2017 (Vovk van Gaal, Dupont 2012).

Institutional Independence

“In principle, the museum was created in an atmosphere of silence, even among the professionals, and without much discussion in the media” (Jares 2017). Poettering acknowledges the Bureau of the European Parliament’s strategy of secrecy, arguing that its creation happened during a challenging time (Mork, Christodoulou 25). The intention was to avoid “disruption and distractions” (Mork, Christodoulou 324), which is why wider public campaigns were largely

avoided. Even amongst Parliamentarians was the strategy to remain low-key in information dispersion to avoid unnecessary conflict about the project (Mork, Christodoulou 325). Staff from the HEH reported that in their few attempts of explaining and relaying information, they noted frictions and confusion between themselves and their Parliamentarian audience (Mork, Christodoulou 53). The fear seems to have been, considering what the museum attempted to do, to avoid uproar amongst member states and their national parliaments and any possible attempts of advocating for a specific historical narrative (Jares 2017).

The plan was to gradually involve other EU institutions “at a later stage when the project could no longer be called into question” (Mork, Christodoulou 24). This strategy can either be viewed as an attempt to present to the other EU Parliamentarians and institutions a quality project that can convince others and gain support based on its merits. Or, to invoke Pierson and his conception of Historic Institutionalism, it was a strategy to heighten the sunk costs on this project, which would eventually make the pulling out on the project for any member state too costly and too complicated.

Public outreach per se happened vaguely in 2011 during European Parliament’s Open Day. A short public survey was administered to the public, gathering 140 responses from visitors that day. Representatives from the HEH never specified what the survey itself said, but they say that those responses gave them “a taste of wider feeling and reflection” (Mork, Christodoulou 98), which is essentially like saying nothing. In 2013, a booklet was released, titled “Building the House of European History”, which gave - in 24 languages - an overview of the creation process, its purpose, and its progress (European Parliament 2013). In terms of media coverage not much can be found in EU member states press’ about the creation of the HEH - not due to an absence of interest, but rather due to the aforementioned strategy of silence (Jares 2017). The British

press constitutes the exception, mentioning the projects price and calling the HEH a “grossly narcissistic project” (Waterfield 2011). Biggest concerns about the project came from the UKIP party (Waterfield 2011, Jares 2017). Interestingly enough, the creators of the HEH have acknowledged the “Europhobic” (Mork, Christodoulou 12) British press and decided to willingly “disregard” them (Mork, Christodoulou 12).

The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) has two key articles that give the European Parliament the jurisdiction to initiate such a project in the first place, and more importantly, to use its own resources to fund the project. As Pierson indicates, it is precisely due to the European institutions acquiring power (i.e. own resources), which makes the filling of gaps, meaning the member states taking back sovereignty difficult and essentially impossible (Pierson 1996). Article 167.1 stipulates that “The Union shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore” (EUR-Lex 2018). Article 167.5 specifically grants the European Parliament to act accordingly and to “adopt incentive measures” (EUR-Lex 2018). Additionally, the TFEU expanded the European Parliament’s power of approving EU budgets in general, but also deciding on their terms how their own budget is managed and allocated (European Parliament 2018).

In order to preserve the “credibility and independence” of the HEH (Mork, Christodoulou 27), the initial goal had been to create the museum “institutionally independent” (Mork, Christodoulou 27). The museum was not supposed to appear as an informational vessel of the European Parliament, but instead objectively tell a European history. The intention was to keep the museum “organizationally integrated” within the bureaucratic structure of the European

Union yet allow and insist on independent content selection by the Academic Team, comprised of historians from all of Europe (Mork, Christodoulou 49).

Not much of that institutional independence remains today. In 2016, at a time when other institutions and people in the EU were brought into the project, the EU Commission agreed to contribute 800,000 Euro annually from its own budget to the museum, demonstrating yet again that these two institutions were capable of financing and/or pursuing their own institutionally driven agenda (Panchini 2016). 2016 brought also about additional changes to the hierarchical and operational relationship between the museum and the European Parliament: any form of communication to the public or other audiences leaving the HEH started requiring the approval of the European Parliament (Mork, Christodoulou 108). Further, the European Parliament has begun to expand its own visitor experiences to attract more attention for their own institutions. Their plans involve the HEH as well (Mork, Christodoulou 118). One can also observe this direct connection on the website of the European Parliament, which not only links to the HEH's website, but also discusses in-depth the existence of the museum on their own platform, advertising it as an opportunity to experience "Europe's past from a different perspective" (European Parliament (1) 2018).

This section illustrated two key aspects surrounding the organizational aspects of the House of European History. First, this project was created in an aura of secrecy. The European Parliament, and the EU Commission to a degree, took advantage of the pre-existing "banal authority" (McNamara 2015) to put in place a path for an exhibition that at some point was difficult to reverse. The ability of the European Parliament (and partially the EU Commission) to fund the project on their own, which are powers and competences given to them by the TFEU, illustrate Pierson's 'gap-making' by the member states, which they are not capable of closing.

Second, the HEH is not a separate entity from the EU institutions. While it is generally referred to as project illustrating European history, its direct connection to the EU is undeniable and arguably its clear intention.

Making pan-European nationalism

With Gellner's (1983) understanding of the purpose of nationalism, that being a process of creating congruence between the political and national unit, the EU is doing just that. It has a political unit, which involves the clear specification of who its members are, and which treaties serve as the legal foundation for its existence. Its hoped for sudden emergence of solidarity through legal treaties has failed to transpire. Bureaucratic intervention has been deemed necessary for quite a while to spur on the intended outcome.

The De Clercq Report already noted in 1993 that there seemed to be a disconnect between the citizens of the European Union and the political elite - but also between the member states and the EU itself. The report in fact notes that member states were quick to claim credit for positive outcomes provided by the EU, while negative situations were generally attributed to the works in Brussels. Attempts had to be made to get people and its member states more involved and have them realize the usefulness of the European Union as a hub for a variety of common civic values (De Clercq 1993).

Ideas thrown around were, for instance, the creation of audio-visual programs, educational materials, or even European sports teams to instill a sense of commonality among the various member state citizens and strengthen communication (De Clercq 1993). Harmonizing of language was key aspect in the report. The report advised against the interchangeability of the terms 'European Union' and 'Europe', as that can cause confusion and bring together concepts,

which shouldn't be brought together (De Clercq 14). Interestingly enough, the HEH does to an extent confuse its audience by being technically about Europe but maintaining its tight connection to the European Parliament. Even though, no teleological message, leading to the inevitable formation of the EU was intended in the HEH, its timeline and the arrangement of the artefacts do lead to that interchangeable conclusion (Mork, Christodoulou 36). Either way, it was a key mission of the report, though, to interact with people in their everyday lives. These ideas were not supposed to be extraordinary in people's lives, but they were supposed to integrate smoothly (De Clercq 1993). As McNamara points out, examples of common symbols, images, anthems, and flags do serve the intended purpose of normalizing the EU in people's everyday lives (McNamara 2015).

Seminal literature on nationalism does not discuss whether international organization (IO) can partake in the creation of nationalism. I do not think that anything stands in the way of this process at the IO level, as the EU, in particular, represents a group of elites in a governing structure, which is capable and has the authority to implement state-like tools and strategies to spread and perpetuate a national narrative, albeit one that extends beyond the classic Westphalian state-borders.

While the tool of language consolidation seems inappropriate and at this point unfeasible in the EU, the harmonization of education ala Gellner (1983) for the purpose of advance political and economic integration is perfectly capable, as the EU holds the legal authority to implement laws and projects along those lines (see again Article 167 of TFEU). As Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) indicate, part of education is also the creation of museums and monuments. The state might be able to hold a captive audience of children in school every day, but the education of adults happens through the creation of common symbols (i.e. monuments) or the creation of

museums. National museums are locus of advancing and steering the population in a specific state-approved narrative.

State-run museums perform a dual function. On one hand, they are supposed “to celebrate the nation or has to convey security and identity to the citizens, even pride” (Schaerer 2012). Maria Schmidt, who is part of the Academic team of the HEH, said about the creation of the museum that the goal was to pick aspects of European history “that represent the finest traits of European civilization” (Mork, Christodoulou 83), which instilled a sense of superiority and admiration of the European continent in contrast to other parts of the world (Mork, Christodoulou 84). A national museum also has to present history in a positive light, so it is easily acceptable by its viewers. Rarely does it allow for parallel narratives or dissenting opinions (Schaerer 2012).

A museum also needs to be seen as a “marketplace” (Aronsson 2012) of sorts, as it is trying to sell its audience on a certain story or a certain angle by using an array of chosen artefacts and symbols to make its case. At the same time, the audience receives a glimpse into an anticipated future (Aronsson 2012). This understanding aligns with Poettering’s assertions and his hopes for shaping a European identity for, with, and by future generations. According to Aronsson, it remains a key policy issues for governments due to their position of “as places for re-enacting communities and values in contemporary society” (Aronsson 2012). Their marketplace attribute also resonates in the fact that the visiting itself of the museum might cost money - indirectly or directly, and that the purchase of ‘souvenirs’ might support either the museum directly or the governmental institution behind it (Luke 225).

More importantly, though, museums carry normative power. They have three ideological purposes: “nodes of knowledge, regime of rules, spaces of objectivity” (Luke 223). The artefacts

chosen by experts to be on display (taken out of its original context) directly guide the visitor into a certain normative direction and perform the function of telling its visitors “what reality really is” (Luke 220). It is up to the curator to draw a careful balance between right out propaganda (although that definition is stretchable) and meaningless displays (Schaerer 2012). “Seeing historical objects, witnessing historical performances, encountering interpretations of history are all behaviors that can alter people’s attitudes in relation to certain political values associated with particular cultural things” (Luke 3). The choice, therefore, to use a museum as a tool to convey a particular message to its audience carries weight and should not be lightly disregarded, as the EU is in the midst of reshaping its own path by redirecting “the consciousness and behavior of museum visitors to advance various governmental goals” (Luke 3).

At the House of European History

The HEH’s location itself places a meaning-making role. It is not located in a ‘random’ city in Europe. It is placed in Brussels. Not in some building in the outskirts of the city. Rather, it resides in the Leopold Park, exactly between the European Parliament and the European Commission. Its location carries the message that this institution, with its historical message, adds to the organizational structure of the EU. One could even argue that it is integral to the structure, as it add cultural value to the political monolith. Locating the museum “in the heart of the EU capital” is significant (Mork, Christodoulou 21).

During a visit to the HEH in August 2018, I observed upon entering the HEH exhibition the following message, which immediately shapes the way the upcoming artefacts and information are interpreted and taken in:

“As we take you through the main exhibition, you will notice that we don’t tell you the story of each European nation. Instead, we want to explore how history has shaped a sense of European memory and continues to influence our lives today and in the future. As in our own lives, some things we want to remember, some things we like to forget. And of course, the same event can be interpreted from different perspectives.”

This introductory message already uses language usually seen in scholarship about nationalism.

First, it is not including competing narratives, but simply overriding them by providing a summation of known narratives. It further speaks of collective remembering and collective forgetting, which both Gellner (1983) and Danforth (1995) highlight as key indicators for creating a national narrative.

An overview of the exhibitions will get across the normative and shaping path the HEH is taking, and how it is underlying what European identity is rooted in. Based on my own experience, the temporary exhibition only adds knowledge in so far, as parts of it have an interactive component, which electronically connects the museum’s visitors to one another by recording where the visitors come from all over the world. Therefore, not only do the artefacts create a connecting story, but even the visit itself already contributes to the narrative of one people coming together and experiencing one idea.

The permanent exhibition is divided into six parts, each discussing a specific period of time. As one walks from the beginning of the exhibition on the second floor all the way to the end of the exhibition on the sixth floor, the visitor is guided from one time period to another along a coherent timeline. The first section, entitled “Shaping Europe”, discusses the Greek myth of Europa, and it indicates how the continent acquired its name (Mork, Christodoulou 134,135).

This section also articulates the difficulty of geographically defining Europe, and it provides various ideas from different phases of cartography ((Mork, Christodoulou 136, 137). Lastly, it highlights aspects of the European heritage: democracy from the Greek, a legal system from Ancient Rome, Christianity, and the Enlightenment. All of these have impacted and made Europe what it is today (Mork, Christodoulou 138-140). It is a glorification of a particular ancient past that illuminates the national narrative (Anderson 1983, Hobsbawm, Ranger 1984). It is not specific enough and lacks enough details to not be objectionable.

The second section of the exhibition is entitled “Europe, a global power”. It is this section that actually begins to define what historic era the museum in general has chosen to focus on, namely 1789 and onward. This section highlights key political changes in the time period of 1789 to 1914, namely major political changes (i.e. the French Revolution, etc.), the industrial period (modernization/ the rise of capitalism), the development of science and technology, and imperialism. The museum articulates that while each country may have gone through different variations, all of them experienced these instances. Therefore, illustrating yet again, that the European states are not that different (Mork, Christodoulou 141 -149). It is an attempt to either cancel out or at least decrease the importance of other competing narratives.

The third section, entitled “Europe in Ruins”, focuses on the time period of 1914 to 1945. It encompasses World War I, the rise of totalitarianism, the decline of democracy, the dichotomy of National Socialism in Germany and Stalinism in Russia, World War II (including the notion that collaboration with the Nazis and resistance to them happened in all of the European states), and the harvest of destruction (Mork, Christodoulou 149-167). Once again, the overarching theme is the common experience of numerous disastrous events. In my understanding, the museum is trying to demonstrate that to varying degrees all parts of the continent were culpable

in the creation of the ruins. At the same time, there were pockets here and there, which actively tried to avoid them. The stressor lies again on the common part.

The fourth section focuses on “Rebuilding a divided continent”. It focuses on the time period of 1945 to the early 1970s. It discusses a new political order, the Cold War, the creation of a social security system (including housing, healthcare, mobility, the rise of consumption, the memory of the Shoah, and, for instance, the divide of East and West Germany. Additionally, this section marks the first key milestone in highlighting European integration. This section of the exhibition highlights the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community, the treaty of Rome, the Common Agricultural Policy of 1960, the first enlargement period, and the EU’s founding fathers (Mork, Christodoulou 168-198). Obviously a part of European history and hard to separate from such an exhibition, it makes sense that the usefulness of the EU is highlighted.

The fifth section of the exhibition, “Shattering Certainties” discusses the time period from the mid-1970s to today. It begins by illustrating the aftermath of the end of the economic boom, and then it proceeds to demonstrate further milestones in EU integration, such as the Helsinki declaration of 1975, the first European Parliament elections, the Southern enlargement of the EU, the creation of the single European market in 1986, and the democratization of the West. In between this part of the exhibition addresses briefly the fall of Communism after the breakup of the Soviet Union. It quickly pivots back to further integration milestones in the EU, such as the treaty of Maastricht, its several additional enlargements, and the Schengen agreement of 1995. Interestingly, it also highlights the failure of the EU constitution in 2005 and alludes to a European instability today (Mork, Christodoulou 199 – 219).

Its last section, entitled “Accolades and Criticism”, focuses on how Europe and the European Union are viewed from the outside, which is an interesting undertaking, considering

that the Academic team, which has chosen those artefacts are entirely from Europe, which adds another subjective layer to the exhibition. One can also view the Nobel Peace Prize medal the EU received in 2012. It is one of the very few original items the museum has on display, as a majority of the other artefacts are on loan. This part of the exhibition also discusses the importance of Brussels, and how this city came to be the capital of the European Union (Mork, Christodoulou 219- 220). Starting with the fourth section, which began to gradually incorporate the importance of the EU in the European continent, all the way to the sixth section, one can clearly observe as a visitor, based on my own experience, a ramping up of these two tracks converging into one.

Conclusion: Facing critique - Contestation of the in-group

Besides the already mentioned and discussed financial critique, the museum faced other dissenting voices in the aftermath of opening its doors. Individual countries, for instance Poland, have spoken up and pointed out the skewing or willfully ignoring of certain historical key moments that apparently have also shaped European history. Poland's main critique is that the exhibition chooses to ignore famous Polish citizens, and instead, highlights Poland's supposed collaboration with the Nazi regime. Jares, a Czech historian, argues that the museum appears like an "empty shrine" (Rankin 2018), meaning that its depiction of history is quite shallow, which I would have to support based on my visit to the museum. Jares also points out that the museum feels "quite German", as a bigger chunk of the museum deals with World War II and its aftermath (Rankin 2018). I wouldn't go as far in that assessment, but I would support Jares notion by arguing that certain key countries, i.e. the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, and the United States, get explicitly more play time than other smaller countries in Europe.

The most notable critique after the opening of the museum came from the *Platform of European Memory and Conscience*, an international NGO, which created a memo of critique following a visit by a team of experts from Latvia, Sweden, Estonia, Lithuania, Germany, Poland, Ukraine and the Czech Republic in August 2017. The NGO offered in 2012 to participate in the creation of the museum, but their offer was rejected by the European Parliament. Their main critique is that the museum is over-representing certain countries while underselling the contribution to history by other countries (i.e. Ukraine and Poland). The memo focuses on the general banalization of the Soviet Union's atrocities, the inadequate size of the World War II portion of the exhibition (as a key factor in European history), the lack of mentioning historic figures and their importance (i.e. Pope John Paul II, President Ronald Reagan, and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher). In certain instances, the museum appears to be falsifying information. For instance, the museum discusses the countries east of the Iron Curtain as having chosen Communism as their regime type. This description changes the narrative from the actual events - the Soviet Union forcing those countries to oblige (Ukielski, Kareniauskaite, Hrynko 2017). It is minute aspects like these that could arguably contribute to an explanation why countries, such as Poland, feel as though they were and are still left behind by their Western partners (Dziennik 2018).

However, and more importantly, none of the critique that has come out after the museum opened its doors is directed at the European Parliament directly for making the initial choice to open a museum in the first place. It is not questioned whether a narrative is created but simply how it has been done. Its entire existence is not being questioned seemingly - with the exception of the "Europhobic" press. I believe McNamara was right when she argued that the European Union, as an institution, had achieved through the normalization of its existence "banal

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authority” (McNamara 2015). The European Parliament has clearly taken that permissive consensus and taken it to the fullest extent. The fact that nobody seems to be objecting its bold move forward in identity shaping and narrative creation supports this conclusion.

It will be interesting to observe if this choice of strategy of defining the in-group will in fact open up the European institutions to more contestation. One could argue that Brexit, the rise of right-wing-national parties in Europe, or the increase in Eurosceptic sympathizers can be seen as an outlet for contestation. Yet, their direct connection to the museum as such is doubtful. Nonetheless, the lack of critique about the institutions overreaching highlights that political groups and member states, failing to fill the gaps and allowing institutions to gain power and resources, have lost out in making a claim for sovereignty in the cultural integration aspect.

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