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Defending the EU: vectors, perspectives, paradigms.

   Much is rotten in the European Union. When the Lisbon Treaty entered into force at the end of 2009, many hoped it would allow the European Union (EU) to harness its vast economy and develop into a liberal superpower, the equal to the United States or China[1]. However, after a decade of moving from crisis to crisis, from the Greek debt to mass migration to Brexit, even the EU's mere long-term survival is now in question[2]. Outside its borders, the EU is threatened by a more aggressive Russia, wars in the Middle East and an increasingly antagonistic relationship with the USA. However, these are only serious enough to threaten the EU's survival because of its inability to muster the consensus necessary to take decisive remedial action. This is due to a fundamental weakness of the Union- a lack of a common European cultural and political identity, which is itself exacerbated by the crises. In the long term, the EU must address the fundamental divergence of interests amongst the EU's citizens and their political representatives. This is clearly a hugely ambitious and vague target, and will not provide a defence against imminent issues, such as Russian electoral interference or increasing economic performance. However, a comprehensive "defence" must think beyond the day-to-day crisis management and prevent the onset of future "crises", before it may realise its aspirations of an ever-closer union of peoples.

   Defining defence

   The question of how to defend the EU rests on a far more basic question of what "a defence" should do. Defence obviously involves resisting threats to one's fundamental interests. According to Realist international relations theories, the most important of these interests for a political entity like the EU is survival, which is a prerequisite for the realisation of any of its other goals or aspirations[3]. While Realism priorities defence against military threats, requiring *military means*, survival equally depends on economic viability and the strength of political institutions to govern. "Defence" can therefore equally be against external or internal threats to survival.

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[1] For example, see Moravcsik, Andrew. "The Quiet Superpower", Princeton University Press; Reding, Andrew (January 6, 2002). "EU in position to be world's next superpower".

[2] For example: Martin, Will (29 May 2018), "George Soros warns the European Union is on the brink of collapse — and Trump is partly to blame", Business Insider.

[3] For example, Hans Morgethau's conceives of politics as "interest defined as power", allowing heterogenous interests to be separated from the core business of politics, tat of maximising power in the name of survival. (See: Morgenthau, Hans J., 1954. Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace)

However, it is too simplistic to define defence as simply "resisting" threats. One should also ask what should defence do, and what makes a defence better than another. The maxim "a good defence is a good offence" hints at a deeper principle, that the ultimate goal of defence should be to no longer need to defend oneself. Rather than fighting to keep the wolf from the door, one should remove the wolf altogether[4]. For the EU, this means that it is not enough to manage the refugee crisis, but it must also put in place measures to ensure that in the event of future humanitarian disasters its neighbourhood the situation can be managed before it develops into a migration crisis, or better yet that such humanitarian disasters never occur at all. Obviously, these longer-term defensive measures are not a substitute for immediate urgent action, and the two should be pursued in parallel.

Threats to the EU today

The threats faced by the EU today come from both inside and outside its borders, and are of a political, security, social and economic nature. There are far too many to discuss in a single paper, let alone the widely divergent responses which they require. The external threats come from every side. To the east, the Russian government has engaged in terrifyingly successful campaigns to destabilise European states (and the USA) through a mixture of disinformation campaigns, interference in elections and the threat of or use of military force[5]. To the south, armed conflicts in Libya, Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere have led to millions of refugees seeking protection in Europe, resulting in backlashes from those in Europe who fear the influx could pose a risk to their countries' culture or security. On the global scale, the EU is threatened by emerging economies, in particular China's aggressive trade policies which challenge European competitiveness and violate intellectual property rights. The United States, traditionally the EU's key external partner in the liberal international order, has increasingly disengaged from Europe, starting with President Obama's "pivot towards Asia" and exacerbated by President Trump's "America first" isolationism and protectionism. Not only is the United States harming EU exporters with major tariffs on EU steel and aluminium, but in international fora it has deserted its European partners by backing out of the Iran Nuclear Deal and Paris Climate Agreements, dealing heavy blows to the interests of the EU.

Internally, poor economic growth and structural weaknesses in the Eurozone, laid bare since the 2008 financial crisis, are still a major challenge, especially in Mediterranean countries

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[4] This is not to advocate the removal of wolves, who pose no threat to the EU.
[5] These terms are sometimes, misleadingly, grouped under the heading of 'hybrid warfare'.

which are still suffering from high unemployment, while Greece is still receiving bailouts[6]. Stagnating economies has contributed to the increased radicalisation of politics, leading to polarisation in many European countries, be it between ethnic groups or, as witnessed in the UK's 2016 EU referendum, between educated urban populations and less educated rural and smaller town populations. This has also lead to disillusionment in traditional political parties and institutions, allowing for the rise of destabilising populist movements, and even political violence, from both Islamist and xenophobic groups which feed off one another.

Reconciling diverging interests

Despite their severity, none of these threats are an existential risk to the EU in themselves. European nations also face these challenges on an individual level, yet the survival of the states themselves is mostly not in question[7]. Some of the external threats to the EU, such as Russian aggression, even provide an opportunity for European solidarity and so strengthen the EU and prove its importance, as it has arguably done for NATO. What all of these challenges have in common, however, is that they have been mismanaged and allowed to develop into crises largely due to the EU's lack of unity in responding to them. None of these threats affect each EU state in the same way: the Baltics have far more to fear from Russian aggression than Austria does; Italy and Greece are more affected by mass migration and Eurozone problems than the UK or Poland.

This divergence of interest slows the reaction to these challenges, as EU Member States struggle to reach agreement and when they do it is watered down, as was particularly clear in the response to the refugee crisis. Diverging interests amongst members of a political community is far from a unique challenge to the EU. Any political community consists of diverse members who will have their own particular goals and preferences. One of the central challenges of politics is how to reconcile these differences and gain sufficient consensus for collective action. Often this can be achieved through bargaining and transactions, whereby interest groups grant concessions to others in exchange for support on their own interests. In Social Network Theory, this form of interaction is referred to as "direct reciprocity"[8]. While this may work in some circumstances, it depends on interests being compatible, and groups having something to offer one another. In the case of the current EU challenges, it is the

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[6] Smith-Meyer, Bjarke (22 May 2018), "Greek deal paves way for August bailout exit", *Politico*
[7] An exception is the United Kingdom, whose unity is in jeopardy due to its departure from the European Union.
[8] Ohtsuki, H., C. Hauert, E. Lieberman, and M. A. Nowak (2006), "A simple rule for the evolution of cooperation on graphs and social networks". *Nature* 441:502–505.

southern, Mediterranean states which mainly require support from wealthier, northern members to cope with their economic and migration difficulties, with less to offer in "exchange". Purely transitional political communities are therefore very fragile, and there can be a fine line between bargaining and blackmailing.

An alternative to such transactional communities is, in Social Network Theoretical terms, "generalised reciprocity", also known as "upstream indirect reciprocity", or "pay-it-forward reciprocity"[9]. This is a less transactional form of exchange, where rather than tit-for-tat bargains, members of a community give and receive without the expectation of immediate reciprocation. However, reciprocity still occurs at a more "general" level, whereby each member of the community ultimately gives and receives over time, to the benefit of everyone. This can be seen as somewhat analogous to a (healthy) familial or romantic relationship, whereby each member gives and receives freely, without specific conditions, on the understanding that the relationship will be to the benefit of all. This is also a model for an ideal "utopian" political community, whereby conflicts of interest have been overcome and there is harmony amongst its members, allowing for consensual collective action[10].

While this form of community is certainly preferable, it also requires a firmer social foundation. The members have to have a great deal of trust in one another that no one will "free ride" and exploit the other members. Usually this is achieved by a 'bond' between the members- a sense of family or community which connects them, or at a larger level a common "identity". This shared sympathy allows great, seemingly selfless sacrifices for another, knowing that by doing so one is strengthening one's 'own' group, and so ultimately oneself. At a European level, such general reciprocity can be clearly seen in the support which West Germany offered to East Germany after reunification in 1990, costing the Federal Republic as much as 2 trillion euros[11]. This far eclipses the funds which Germany has recently needed to extend to Greece, whose entire GDP is less than 10% of that amount. However, as the Federal Republic was not helping an "other" but rather a part of their own ideational community, it was far more readily accepted by the population than the assistance to failing Eurozone economies. EU-wide generalised reciprocity therefore requires a common sense of EU identity, both amongst citizens and their representatives.

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[9] Van Doorn, Gerrit Sander & Taborsky, Michael, (2011) "The Evolution of Generalized Reciprocity On Social Interaction", *Evolution*, p.2

[10] For example, the works of Henri de Saint-Simon and Charles Fourrier.

[11] *Der Spiegel*, (12 September 2011) Interview with former German finance minister Peer Steinbrück

An EU common identity: general and political

How a nation "identifies" and views itself is a product of its culture, by which humans or societies can be categorised into distinct, internally homogenous groups. These categories are not exclusive- a person can have multiple identities or cultures, such as being a Jewish-Italian, or British-Pakistani. Some cultures also exist as subsets of another, e.g. Norwegian and Nordic cultures. A national culture is the product of an area's geography, resources, history, society and political structure. For example, Britain's island location is often cited as a cause for its perceived exceptionalism. In a democratic state with a national identity, the culture of the political-class will mostly reflect, to some extent, the beliefs and values of the society either because they themselves have been socialised in that way or as an electoral strategy, to appeal to the greatest part of the population. For example, one could connect a British culture of insularity to support both within the political class and among the general population to leave the European Union. This is not necessarily the case in dictatorships, whose policies can be determined by a leader with no cultural connection to the society, or in highly divided societies, where a leader may emerge from a minority group and have little cultural connection to their society as a whole.

The EU clearly does have some level of shared culture, which the EU has actively tried to encourage through programmes such as Erasmus exchanges and flying EU flags. The problem is that this culture is fairly weak, and often seen as conflicting with national cultures. Like a gas, culture exists at different densities depending on the size of its container: the broader the category of culture, the more elements it will contain and so the less descriptive it will be. The commonalities which the EU's population share as a whole are much less pronounced than on a national scale. The EU member states are diverse, in terms of size, wealth, geography, diversity, religion, history and language, and hence hold different priorities and beliefs.

There are still some cultural preferences which could be plausibly labelled as distinctly "European", such as an endorsement of human rights and democracy- although the Polish and Hungarian governments' actions make this increasingly questionable- and some legacies of its largely Christian roots- although Christianity too is falling across most of Europe[12]. In any case, such elements are so vague to have very little tangible impact on states' behaviour, making it hard to show that they are not purely symbolic features of European "identity". They are also shared by many other states around the world, preventing them from being part of a specifically "European" culture, any more than consuming beer is a part of "Dutch culture".

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[12] *Pew Research Centre*, (2015) "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050"

In search of a model of a more culturally-unified Europe, one could look to the past. However, for most of its history Europe has been even more culturally divided than it is today. Poorer communication and transportation technologies left Europeans far more isolated than they are today. In the Cold War, Eastern and Western Europe were strictly divided. Earlier, divisions existed between Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim states, which deeply affected their cultures.

However, while such divisions between European people are more pronounced the further back one looks, the inverse is true of their leaders. Before the rise of absolute monarchies in the 16th century, most of Europe was ruled by aristocracies who were untied by their Catholic faith and obedience to the Vatican, with little concept of cohesive, 'national' differences between states that dominated after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. These monarchs had far less in common with the culture of their people than with other European monarchs, who had a similar upbringing and were often relatives. This Europe-wide, socialised ruling elite allowed for the existence of unique and homogenous cultural policies, including chivalry and religious wars, such as the Crusades and the defence of Europe against the Ottomans. This is the closest Europe has ever come to having a meaningfully unified political culture, even if its general culture was far more heterogenous.

How to promote an EU political culture

Given the link between national culture and political culture in democratic nation-states, creating a European political culture that would allow for generalised reciprocity between Member States would involve the creation of a far denser European culture. Cultures are spread through socialisation. Unfortunately, the cost of international travel still restricts it to a relatively small group, even with the assistance of programmes such as Erasmus. Most Europeans continue to work, live and marry within their country of birth. To change this and create an EU culture sufficiently dense that most citizens would treat other countries comparably to other regions of their own countries, it would require far greater levels of socialisation through transnational contact. Policies could include making Erasmus exchanges an obligatory part of education. This could be a year of *international* service, analogous to the national civil or military services obligations in some EU member states, the only difference being that the service was for the benefit of another EU country. More radically, the EU could encourage Members to curtail cultural protectionism measures which privilege arts and entertainment of one's national culture over those from other EU countries.

These measures would likely prove highly unpopular in many EU countries, and be seen as an attempt to erode national cultures and even create a culturally-uniform "United States of Europe". This need not be the case. Individuals can have both religious and national identities, which are nourished and expressed in different ways at different times. In the same way, it is possible to have both a complimentary national and European identities, not to mention regional levels in-between such as the Baltic, Scandinavia or the Balkans.

Alternatively, for the purposes of EU political cooperation, European-scale socialisation is easier when it concerns just a political class, as with the medieval aristocracy (or students of elite, multinational graduate schools today). For a "trans-cultural elite" to rule according to their shared values, they would need to be unencumbered by local cultural divisions which may push them to act according to their national interests. It would therefore be necessary to remove democratic control over EU-level policy. Given the existing level of resentment towards "unaccountable EU bureaucrats" amongst EU citizens, it is hard to imagine how any EU member state could accept such a proposal. The creation of a common EU political culture must therefore occur from the ground up, throughout European society.

Conclusion

The EU faces a wide range of internal and external threats, which it has succeeded in overcoming, but only with difficulty and increased internal discord. In order to defend the EU as a long-term project and overcome future crises, it is essential that EU member states adopt a policy of "generalised reciprocity", in order to assist one another when in need, without demanding conditions. For this to be possible, citizens from different EU member states must possess a far greater sense of shared identify through a denser "EU culture" than currently exists. Policies to achieve this already somewhat exist, but do not go nearly far enough to promote transnational socialisation and a hybrid national-European identity. Stronger policies could include mandatory international service or greater exposure to international media.

Should this sound unappealing, European states will have to accept their divergent cultures as they are, and base their cooperation on pragmatism and shared interests instead. One could give up on 'unified' European initiatives, and employ instead proposed 'patchwork', 'hub and spoke' or 'cluster' models[13], whereby cooperation would take place through subsets of European states, who already meaningfully share security (and general) culture, such as the

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[13] Tocci, N. & Faleg, G., (2013), "Towards a more untied and effective Europe: A Framework for Analysis", *Instituto Affari Internazionali*¸ No. 1, October 2013

Benelux or Baltic states, and already sing from the same hymn-sheet. However, in the long-run this centrifugal force may lead to the further fragmentation of Europe: the ultimate failure of the EU to defend itself.

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