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The European Union as a "Nation": The "Nation" that Effaces Itself?

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Abstract

This article examines the European Union (EU) in light of Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as "an imagined community … imagined as inherently limited and sovereign." Current scholarship mostly rejects the possibility of an EU nation, or treats it only as a possible eventuality, not a current reality. Interpreting Andersonian "sovereignty" through the lens of political legitimacy, the EU nevertheless satisfies all four of Anderson's criteria, since members of the EU Parliament invoke a "European people" to legitimize their actions. EU nationhood coexists with other national loyalties. However, multiple national loyalties exist elsewhere in Europe, since British nationhood coexists with Welsh nationhood, German nationhood with Sorbian nationhood, and so on. Eurobarometer evidence also suggests that multiple loyalties are widespread. Treating the EU as a nation offers many analytical advantages, since scholars do not need to struggle with terminological novelties, but can straightforwardly apply the secondary literature on nationalism.

Keywords

Introduction

This article proposes thinking about the European Union (EU) as a "nation," suggesting that it qualifies as such according to the definition given in Benedict Anderson's 1983 masterwork *Imagined Communities*. We suggest that EU politics can be usefully understood as a form of "nationalist" politics, and Europhile political sentiment as a form of "nationalism." Our argument is mostly terminological. Our suggestions are not intended to push either the politics or the rhetoric of the EU in any particular direction. We are neither considering the advantages and/or disadvantages of the EU, nor suggesting ways to improve it. We suggest, however, that the scholarly habit of treating

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the EU as something non-national or post-national generates unnecessary confusion, and that conceptualizing the EU as a "nation" could facilitate analysis.

This article starts by documenting how rarely scholars describe the EU in national terms. It then introduces Benedict Anderson's influential definition of the nation. It pays particular attention to Anderson's tricky criterion of "sovereignty," suggesting that if Andersonian sovereignty is interpreted as a theory of political legitimacy, political rhetoric enables us to document its presence. Surveying political rhetoric in conjunction with Eurobarometer polls suggests that the EU fits Anderson's definition of the "nation." Anticipating possible objections, the article then briefly discusses multiple coexisting national sovereignties. The conclusion, documenting the cumbersome terminologies developed in order to describe a non-national EU, sketches possible benefits of adopting a "national" terminology.

Our argument primarily concerns the analytical concepts scholars use to describe the project of European integration. Rejecting the nationhood of the EU forces scholars to analyze nationalism-like phenomena without employing nationalism theory and its associated insights. EU politicians, perhaps, have good reasons for eschewing nationalist terminology, but scholars would benefit from analyzing the EU and its politics through the lens of nationalism theory.

Before presenting our primary argument about the term "nation," we must clarify a secondary issue about the terms "Europe" and "European." Our analysis, firstly, distinguishes "Europe" from "the European Union." While politicians, journalists and scholars routinely use the word "Europe" as shorthand for "the European Union," this ubiquitous shorthand problematically gives "Europe" a land border with Brazil (in French Guiana) while classifying Switzerland and Norway as non-Europe. For similar reasons, we distinguish "EU politics" from "European politics," since the latter, broader category need not involve the European Union.

Similar considerations, furthermore, led us to shun the term "European nationalism" entirely. We formulate the subject of our paper as "EU nationalism," understood as a form of state-framed nationalism focused on or adhering to the European Union and/or its predecessor institutions. We distinguish "EU nationalism" from "particularist nationalisms," such as Austrian nationalism, British nationalism, Catalan nationalism, Danish nationalism, English nationalism, French nationalism, German nationalism, and so on. We acknowledge that these particularist nationalisms appear in Europe, as opposed to Africa or Asia, and thus acknowledge that they in some

sense qualify as examples of "European nationalism," as opposed to African or Asian nationalism. We nevertheless fear that confusion arises from the ubiquitous habit of conflating "Europe" with "the EU." We thus shun the terms "European nation" and "European nationalism," except insofar as they appear in quotations.

The notion of EU nationalism has already attracted some scholarly discussion. Several scholars, for instance, have speculated about a potential EU nation which does not yet exist, but which might appear in the future. Paola Cattani, for example, thought it might "be possible to build a '*nation européenne*' founded not on a shared language, religion, or ethnicity (which are all insufficient criteria to build Europe with all its diversity), but on a shared sense of belonging, on a conscious choice shared by its citizens" (Cattani 2017, 681). Markus Koch, proclaiming "the necessity of the *Europäische Nation*," treated "the concept of the nation, the European nation" as "a developmental concept, part of a process whose end – even if it may exist, will not be speculated about here" (Koch 2019, 11, 27). Stephen Hill though not only that the EU "enjoys many of the advantages of a single nation," but pondered whether the EU was becoming "an eventual single nation or a more unified superagency" (Hill 2010, 4, 18). Ariane Chebel d'Appollonia, discussing "the concept of a 'European nationalism,'" saw "no necessary contradiction between European ideals and national identities, between European unification and national nationalism," though she ultimately concluded that the EU "offers little that can inspire collective enthusiasm … *Homo Europeanus* is still waiting to be made" (d'Appollonia, 2002, 171–172). Suggesting that "national identities took hundreds of years to evolve," Neil Fligstein judged it "too early to see a majority emerging to create a European nation" (Fligstein 2009, 157).

Only a handful of scholars ascribe a nationalist character to the EU as it currently exists. David Troitino, a rare exception, interpreted the EU as promoting "a hybrid system of identification, where the local national identity will be still cohabitating with the European national identity" (Troitino 2017, 131). Significantly, Troitino's EU nationalism does not erase particularist nationalisms: by imagining that EU nationalism coexists with "local national identity," he implicitly posited simultaneous, coexisting, plural nationalisms.

Numerous scholars, however, reject the theoretical possibility of an EU nation, often with great vehemence. Franco-Bulgarian philosopher Tzvetan Todorov flatly insisted that "there will never be a European nation or people" (Todorov 2010, 71). British economist Keith Hartley juxtaposed "a non-existent and hypothetical model of a single European nation to the reality of independent nation states" (Hartley 2020, 70). Viennese-born political scientist Stanley

Hoffmann claimed that "there can be no European nation," (Hoffmann 2000, xvi), while French Philosopher Jean-Marc Ferry not only declared that "Europe is not a nation," but insisted that "Europe cannot be constituted as a nation" in the future (Ferry 2009, 160).

The existence or non-existence of an EU nation, or EU nationalism, of course, depends on initial definitions. So what is a nation, exactly? There is no consensus scholarly definition, and no hope of achieving one. Nationalism theorists have indeed taken so many different approaches that historiographic surveys themselves form a considerable literature (Smith 1971; Llobera 1999; Özkırımlı 2000; Atsuko & Uzelac 2005; Lawrence 2005; Kuzio 2007). This very lack of consensus, however, makes absolute denials of EU nationalism suspect. How can scholars possibly be so categorical? Surely, the EU qualifies as a nation according to some definition or other?

Benedict Anderson's Definition of the Nation

Indeed, we suggest that the EU qualifies as a nation according to what is arguably the most influential definition to emerge from the field of nationalism studies. Benedict Anderson's 1983 *Imagined Communities*, once described as "the fifth-most cited book in the social sciences and by the far most cited text in the study of nationalism" (Breuilly et al. 2016, 626), famously defined the nation as "an imagined political community." Less famously, Anderson also specified that the nation is "imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 1991, 5). Anderson treated each of his four criteria as essential: one absence disqualifies. Anderson's nation is thus imagined, a community, inherently limited, and sovereign.

Anderson clarified his four criteria in elaborating paragraphs. Anderson's nation is (1) *imagined,* "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." Anderson's nation is (2) a *community* because "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship." The nation is (3) *inherently limited* because it has borders: "no nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation in the way it was possible … for, say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet." Anderson's nation, finally, is (4) *sovereign* because its rise occurred when "Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained hierarchical dynastic realm," adding that "nations dream of being free … the gage and emblem

of this freedom is the sovereign state." (Anderson 1991, 5–7). If the EU meets Anderson's definition, then absolute denials of EU nationhood become problematic.

The European Union, we suggest, easily satisfies the first three of Anderson's four criteria. As the EU's 400+ million citizens are not all personally acquainted with each other, the EU is obviously "imagined" in Anderson's sense, as indeed are "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact" (Anderson 1991, 6). Some critics have found this criterion too inclusive: Anthony Smith, for instance, conceded that while "the nation as a community of people, most of whom will never know or meet one another, is an imagined community … so is every community above the face-to-face level" (Smith 2000, 59). Anderson's full definition, of course, answers Smith's objection: Andersonian's definition has four criteria. Nations are not just "imagined" communities; they must be imagined as "inherently limited" and "sovereign."

The EU also qualifies as a "community" in Anderson's sense. The Treaty of Lisbon, the most recent incarnation of the treaty on the Union of Europe, provides a legal foundation for the European Union in place of a formal constitution. The Treaty of Lisbon invokes "equality" as a European value in its preamble (articles 2 and 21). Article 9 additionally specifies "the principle of the equality of its citizens." The treaty also proclaims "equality between men and women" (articles 2 and 3), and alludes to "its general efforts to eliminate inequalities between women and men" in article 19. Article 4, finally, proclaims "equality between member states" (Treaty of Lisbon, 2007). These fine phrases may not reflect practical politics; the EU had not always lived up to its own ideals. On the other hand, what nation has achieved full social equality? The point is that the EU's proponents envision Anderson's "deep, horizontal comradeship," as opposed to, say, the estate-based hierarchies that characterized medieval and early modern Europe.

The EU, furthermore, is "inherently limited" in Anderson's sense, since its members define Europe in opposition to non-European others. The finer details of such "othering" are too complex and contested to survey in detail here, not least because the EU has historically been defined in opposition to many different "others," including Soviet communism, Turkish and/or African Islam, or money-grubbing American vulgarity (Diez 2004; Eder 2006; Antonsich 2008, 511–513; Markovits 2009, 201–224). The lack of consensus about where Europe's borders lie has practical consequences, e.g., for the often ill-tempered discussion about Turkey's possible EU accession (Jung and Raudvere 2008; Scherpereel 2010; Gerhards and Silke 2011).

Yet even if EU leaders and citizens disagree about where or how to draw Europe's limits, they agree that Europe must have limits somewhere. The most messianic Europeans do not dream of a European Japan, or a European Nigeria. EU leaders do not dream of a European planet.

Anderson's fourth criterion, however, proves less straightforward. Anderson insists that the nation is "sovereign." Deciding whether the EU possesses sovereignty again depends on initial definitions. What is sovereignty? What might it mean for a community imagined as inherently limited to possess it?

When considering whether or not the EU possesses "sovereignty" in the Andersonian sense, the extensive legal literature on sovereignty proves surprisingly unhelpful. Bardo Fassbender thought that sovereignty "has two complementary and mutually dependent dimensions: Within a state, a sovereign power makes law with the assertion that this law is supreme and ultimate … Externally, a sovereign power obeys no other authority" (Fassbender 2003, 116). Stephen Krasner, by contrast, argued that "the term *sovereignty* has been used in four different ways – international legal sovereignty, Westphalian sovereignty, domestic sovereignty and interdependence sovereignty" (Krasner 1999, 3). After initially distinguishing "state sovereignty" from "popular sovereignty," Étienne Balibar even hypothesized "acts of sovereignty without any definite sovereignty, or if you prefer, acts of a 'sovereignty without subject'" (Balibar 2004, 134, 157). With so many different definitions of "sovereignty," and indeed different taxonomies differentiating multiple sovereignties, it becomes difficult to know which test to apply. Indeed, when Martin Louchlin proposed a ten-point description of sovereignty, he began with the observation that the term "has been given such a variety of ambiguous and confused meanings that many have suggested that, in the interests of precision and rigour, the concept should be altogether abandoned" (Loughlin 2003, 55).

Almost all legal definitions of sovereignty, however, presuppose a state. Jurists routinely invoke or paraphrase a dictum from seventeenth-century royalist Charles Loyseau: "sovereignty is so inseparable from the state that if the former is taken away, the latter vanishes" (Loyseau 1610, 14).

A state-framed definition of sovereignty, whatever its merits in other contexts, proves inapplicable to Anderson's definition of nationalism. It implies, for example, that Poland ceased to be a nation for the duration of Nazi occupation. While Anderson ignored the possibility that nationalists might reject statehood (Maxwell and Turner 2020), he did not claim that all nations had their own states. The "sovereign state" may be "the gage and emblem" of national freedom, but Anderson did not claim that all nations are free, only that "nations dream of being free." Since an aspirational state apparently

satisfies Anderson's criterion, a state-framed definition of sovereignty will not do.

Anderson's fourth criterion, we suggest, can be reinterpreted in terms of legitimacy. An Andersonian nation we suggest, is a community imagined as inherently limited and capable of bestowing political legitimacy. Before nationalism arose, elites in a "divinely-ordained hierarchical dynastic realm" wielded power in the name of a monarch, and monarchs claimed to rule through divine sanction as gods, as the descendants of gods, as the shadow of God, by the grace of God, or by the mandate of heaven; similar formulae emerged from different religious traditions. Nationalists, by contrast, claim to wield power, or aspire to wield power, in the name of "the people," variously imagined. The nation, in this interpretation, exists to be invoked in justification. The nation is sovereign because the "national" will is legitimate by definition.

In Europe, the shift from divinely-bestowed dynastic sovereignty to national sovereignty is easily traced through legislative preambles. During the Napoleonic era, for example, the Habsburg Emperor Franz II/I dissolved the Holy Roman Empire and was thus compelled to devise a new title for himself. Uninfluenced by the rhetoric of the French Revolution, he chose to proclaim himself, among other honors, "by grace of God Emperor of Austria, King of Jerusalem, Hungary, Bohemia, Dalmatia, Croatia, Slavonia, Galicia and Lodomeria" (Anon 1806). Though novel in its details, this formula evoked centuries of non-nationalist dynastic tradition: European monarchs had claimed to rule "by grace of God" since the early Middle Ages (Range 2019).

The republican states that emerged from the wreckage of the Habsburg monarchy, by contrast, legitimized themselves with reference to some collective popular will. The first Czechoslovak Constitution declared in its first general provision that "the people [*Lid*] are the sole source of all State power in the Czechoslovak Republic," while the preamble justified the constitution as the collective will of "We, the Czechoslovak nation" (Constitutional charter 1920, 21, 19). The constitution of the Austrian Republic, ratified that same year, similarly declared that "Austria is a Democratic Republic. Its laws come from the people [*vom Volk*]" (Bundesverfassungsgesetz 1920, 1791). The 1919 constitution of the short-lived Hungarian Council Republic, in an interesting socialist variant, declared that "the proletariat exercises all central and local power" (Tanácsköztársaság 1919, 1078). Details varied, but some incarnation of the popular will replaced divine consecration. Political rhetoric documents a shift in legitimacy, and thus the emergence of nationalism.

Andersonian "Sovereignty" and EU Rhetoric

If Andersonian "sovereignty" is equated with the invocation of a legitimacy-bestowing collective, then empirical evidence can show whether Anderson's fourth criterion applies to the European Union. A wide variety of primary sources reveal how EU politicians imagine the EU's legitimacy. If EU politicians justify their actions by invoking a "European nation," a "European people," or something similar, then they are positing EU national sovereignty. If they do not, they are not.

Analyzing how EU politicians legitimize their policies has little to do with analyzing the EU's supposed "legitimacy crisis" (Longo and Murray 2015; Schweiger 2016) or "legitimacy deficit" (Føllesdal 2006). Vivian Schmitt (2020, 22–55) has devised a memorable tripartite taxonomy of legitimacies for the EU to address: input legitimacy, output legitimacy, and throughput legitimacy, to be respectively addressed through a more direct electoral mandate, greater transparency, and more efficient use of taxpayer resources. Ascertaining Andersonian sovereignty, however, asks neither how the EU might enjoy greater legitimacy, nor whether the EU is actually legitimate. It simply asks what EU politicians invoke to justify their actions.

How, then, do EU politicians justify their actions? The aforementioned Treaty of Lisbon proclaimed that the EU represents the will of "the High Contracting Parties," that is, the member states. It was issued in the names of various heads of state: the treaty's preamble lists five kings or queens as well as "his royal highness, the grand duke of Luxembourg" (Treaty of Lisbon 2007). The Treaty of Lisbon, perhaps, does not qualify as a formal constitution, but the 2004 draft EU constitution, signed on October 29 and eventually ratified by 18 member states, ultimately floundered when Danish and French voters rejected it in referenda. Since its preamble declared that "the peoples of Europe are determined to transcend their ancient divisions," however, it ascribed legitimate agency to the "peoples of Europe," imagined in the plural. The text also thanked its framers for acting "on behalf of the citizens and States of Europe," wording that assigns equal agency to citizens and member states (Treaty Establishing a Constitution 2004). These documents, in short, provide little evidence of EU nationalism.

Politicians in the European Parliament, however, routinely imagine the "people" of the EU as a fount of legitimacy, thus investing it with Andersonian sovereignty. As a sample of EU political rhetoric, we examined debates in the European Parliament between 1992 and 2012, analyzing both official English

translations and the the original text in other EU languages.[1] Parliamentary speeches suggest that several MEPs from across the political spectrum have ascribed legitimacy not to plural European "peoples," but to a singular European "people," often specifically described as the "people of Europe." In a speech from 2004, for instance, Irish Liberal MEP Brian Crowley proclaimed that members of the European parliament

> have the great privilege in this House to be the representatives of the people of Europe. We have a duty to take real decisions on their behalf, not on the altar of any ideology but according to what we believe is in the best interests of the people of Europe (Crowley 2004, 25).

Slovak MEP Jaroslav Paška of the Slovak National Party similarly characterized MEPs not as representatives of individual constituencies, but as "representatives of the people of Europe [*európskeho ľudu*]" (Paška 2011, 191). Martin Schulz, a German Social Democrat MEP, saw the European parliament as

> the forum where the interests of Europe's people [*Bürgerinnen und Bürgern Europa*] are represented. This is where we, the representatives of the people of Europe [*des europäischen Volkes*], preside. That is why I say that the people of Europe [*Bürgerinnen und Bürger*], who expressed their confidence in us in direct elections, rightly expect us to uphold their interests (Schulz 2012, 4).

By depicting EU citizens as a singular "European people" whose interests are tautologically legitimate, these politicians imagine a fount of legitimacy indistinguishable from an EU nation.

EU politicians frequently invoked the "people of Europe" as the ultimate fount of legitimacy when debating the EU's constitutional foundations. Several MEPs, for example, objected that the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht, which required a referendum only in Denmark, France and Ireland, otherwise proceeded without a direct mandate from European voters. When Danish voters initially rejected the treaty in June 1992, Danish Social Democrat MEP John Iversen supported opposition on the grounds that "European integration

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1 Accessibility concerns led us to focus on speeches given between 1994 and 2012. Speeches given in the European Parliament before 1994 must be specifically requested from the Research Service of its Historical Archives. Transcripts of speeches given from 1994 onward are freely available online, but after 2012 verbatim translating ceased as a cost-cutting measure.

can only come about if the people of Europe [*Europas folk*] want it and feel at ease with it" (Iversen 1992, 126). Even as notorious a Eurosceptic as Ian Paisley of Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party accused Brussels elites of believing "that the people of Europe can only be allowed to vote when they vote the way the European establishment wants them to vote" (Paisley 1992, 127). Hungarian MEP Zoltán Balczó of the far-right Jobbik party thought the parliaments of member states had no right to ratify the Treaty of Lisbon if "the people of Europe [*Európa népe*] do not accept this constitution" (Balczó 2009, 41). Independent British MEP Nicole Sinclaire complained that "the will of the people across Europe has been ignored, a single currency has been created, against the will of the people of Europe" (Sinclaire 2011, 129–130). But perhaps Irish Republican Mary Lou McDonald of Sinn Fein most strikingly invoked the will of a collective European people while discussing the treaty of Lisbon: "Would the people of Europe support such a Treaty? I believe they would not, and perhaps that is why they are not being asked" (McDonald 2008, 10). Since Ireland actually held a referendum on the Treaty, McDonald was speaking not as an Irish leader on behalf of Irish constituents, but as a European leader speaking on behalf of Europeans outside the Republic of Ireland.

Indeed, European Union politicians have justified all sorts of policy initiatives by invoking the will or interests of the "people of Europe." In 1997 Wilfried Martens, Christian Democratic MEP and former Prime Minister of Belgium, justified an active foreign policy on the grounds that "the people of Europe [*de Europeanen*] … want Europe to remain a partner on the world stage" (Martens 1997, 114). Spanish MEP José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado of the European People's Party claimed in 1997 that "the security that the people of Europe [*los europeos*] are demanding of us as the century draws to a close is at once economic security, internal security and security vis-à-vis the rest of the world" (Gil-Robles 1997, 105). In 1998, British Foreign Minister and former President-in-Council of the European Council Robin Cook declared environmental protection an issue "of paramount concern to the people of Europe," adding that "the people of Europe want us to be serious in our duty to take care of the planet and to hand it on to our children in good order" (Cook 1998, 122). In 2012, the German-born French MEP Daniel-Cohn Bendit warned that without environmental reforms the future might "belong to the markets and not the European people [*peuple européen*]" (Cohn-Bendit 2012, 12).

European Union politicians have also justified various policies by invoking the "citizens of Europe." German Social Democrat Martin Schulz, two-

time president of the European Parliament, proclaimed in 2006 that "what the citizens of Europe [*die Bürgerinnen und Bürger Europas*] want is more transparency" (Schulz 2006, 3), and in 2011 that "the citizens of Europe want transparent policies and they want to know where their fate is being discussed" (Schulz 2011, 9). During the 2011 debt crisis, German Green MEP Rebecca Harms declared that "the citizens of the European Union [*Bürger in der Europäischen Union*] want the European Union" (Harms 2011, 12). The Dutch MEP Barry Madlener, member of the Eurosceptic Party for Freedom, opposed Greek bailout legislation on the grounds that "the citizens of Europe [*de burgers van Europa*] have been deceived" (Madlener 2011, 14).

The concept of "citizens," arguably, differs from that of "the people," but it is worth noting that the EU translation service routinely conflates the two when translating into English. The EU parliamentary record of Schutlz's 2012 speech, discussed above, translated both *des europäischen Volkes* and *Bürgerinnen und Bürger* as "the people of Europe." Translations from Italian similarly conflate *cittadini* and "the people." Italian MEP Cristiana Muscardini, member of the conservative National Alliance party, insisted that "the people of Europe [*i cittadini europei*] will have the right to know the origin of what they buy" (Muscardini 2010, 42). Italian MEP Sonia Alfano of the anti-corruption Italy of Values party justified a bill against organized crime to "protect the interests of the people of Europe [*dei cittadini del'UE*]" (Alfano 2011, 96). If EU parliamentary translators conflate "citizens" with "the people," then in the EU parliament invoking the will of citizens and invoking the will of the people are functionally equivalent.

Several EU politicians, therefore, have invested with legitimacy the "European people," the singular "people of Europe," or the "citizens of Europe." If scholars acknowledge particularist nationalism when, say, German, Hungarian, or Italian politicians invoke the German people, the people of Hungary, or the citizens of Italy, then it seems that the rhetoric of EU politicians qualifies as EU nationalism. When Balibar described the EU not as a nation but as "a new type of political entity," he located its novelty in taking "decisive steps *beyond the concept of sovereignty* as it was progressively elaborated throughout the history of nation-states" (Balibar 2004, ix). We suggest, however, that the EU politicians invest the people of the EU with a sovereignty essentially similar to the sovereignty of the people, that is, with the basis of nationalism.

In summary, Anderson's definition applies to the EU. His definition contains four main criteria, and the EU straightforwardly satisfies three. Anderson's fourth criterion of sovereignty proves problematic. Yet if the fourth criterion is interpreted as the ability to legitimize political authority, then sundry evidence

suggests that the EU meets Anderson's fourth criterion as well, and thus qualifies as "a nation." Indeed, a wide variety of other sources might provide additional evidence of European feeling. Newspaper editorials invoking the "people of Europe," surely, would not be hard to find. Those who choose to view the EU as a nation thus have some theoretical justification.

We are not the first scholars to notice that the EU satisfies Benedict Anderson's definition, but our predecessors, curiously, have proved reluctant to actually describe the EU as a nation. Thomas Diez, explicitly referring to Anderson's definition, noted that the EU has "a kind of political identity that reaches beyond the immediate face-to-face encounter and therefore needs imagination," but concluded that "Europe is not a 'nation' in the traditional sense of the term," since "the imagination of 'Europe' [is] different from that of the nation" (Diez 2004, 320). After summarizing Anderson's work at length, Cirilia Toplak and Irena Šumi found much in the EU that "appears to confirm Anderson's theses," but did not see the EU as a nation. They could only speculate that "future projects … may include the potential of uniting Europeans in feelings of belonging" to something they described as "a sort of 'quasi-national' European identity" (Toplak and Šumi 2012, 8–9, 19).

Multiple Nationalized Sovereignties

Some readers may object that EU politicians differ from nationalist politicians because they simultaneously claim legitimacy both from "Europe" as a whole and from a particularist member state. If the member states are nations, such reasoning goes, then the EU cannot be. In practice, however, nationalist politicians and constitutional documents alike routinely invoke multiple, simultaneous nations. Simultaneous nations imply that an "EU nation" can coexist with particularist "nations" in the member states.

The fact that multiple loyalties and multiple sovereignties may coexist is an important if oft-neglected feature of both sovereignty and nationalism. Consider, for example, where sovereignty resides in the Federal Republic of Germany. Germany's Basic Law declares in article 20 that "all state authority is derived from the people [*vom Volke*]," and the preamble claims that the constitution represents "the German people [*das Deutsche Volk*]" (Grundgesetz 1949, 1). The constitutions of individual federal states, however, claim a similar mandate: the Saxon Constitution, for example, claims in its preamble to speak for "the people in the Free State of Saxony [*das Volk im Freistaat Sachsen*]" (Verfassung des Freistaates Sachsen 1992). Furthermore, the Saxon parliament's Sorbian law, passed in 1999, acknowledges in its preamble not only "the will of the Sorbian people [*des sorbischen Volkes*]," but their "right

to national and ethnic identity" (Sächsisches Sorbengesetz 1999). Sorbian, Saxon, and German sovereignties thus coexist in relevant constitutional and legal documents.

Both Sorbian and German sovereignties, furthermore, are routinely framed in "national" terms. Minority rights expert Detlev Rein, asking whether "somebody who considers himself a member of the Sorbian people [*des sorbischen Volkes*] is also a member of the German people [*des deutschen Volkes*]," concluded that "the Sorbs are part of the German people [*des deutschen Volkes*]" (Rein 2018, 40-41). Nor are such shared sovereignties restricted to legal documents. As a Sorbian informant interviewed by oral historian Karin Bott-Bodenhausen declared, "we belong to the Sorbian people, which lives inside the German people [*wir gehöhren zum sorbischen Volk, das innerhalb des deutschen Volkes wohnt*]" (Bott-Bodenhausen 1997, 118).

The United Kingdom provides another striking example of divided nationalized sovereignties. British legal jargon, admittedly, insists that the British parliament alone possesses sovereignty *de jure*, and that the devolved Scottish and Welsh parliaments do not. Insofar as the Scottish and Welsh parliaments wield legitimate authority and routinely justify themselves as "national," however, they enjoy nationalized sovereignty *de facto*. Even before devolution, furthermore, politicians in the United Kingdom simultaneously invoked both a "British nation" and particularist Welsh and Scottish "nations." In a 1977 address to the House of Commons, for instance, Welsh Labour MP (and subsequent MEP) Tom Ellis explicitly posited multiple and simultaneous nations within the United Kingdom. Though acknowledging difficulties with "the question of nationhood and the definition of nationhood," he argued:

> I do not think that anyone could give a precise definition, but to deny the existence of such a thing as an English nation, a Scottish nation or a Welsh nation is absurd, and to proclaim the recent creation of the British nation, as one honourable member did, is equally absurd (Ellis 1977).

Not all British politicians shared Ellis's views: Tory MP for Brighton Julien Amery, earlier that same day, had unequivocally rejected particularist nations within the United Kingdom. Declaring it "blasphemy to try to cut up the living organism of the British nation," Amery proclaimed: "I deny that there is such a thing as a Scottish nation, or a Welsh nation, or an English nation" (Amery 1977). Amery's comments, however, provoked a sharp riposte from Scottish Labour MP James Sillars: "I immediately differ from the right hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery), who believes that there are no

such things as a Scottish nation, a Welsh nation and an English nation. I believe that all three exist." Sillars explicitly posited "component nations, inside the British nation" (Sillars, 1977).

The historical record provides further examples. The Slovak National Council's Martin Declaration of October 30, 1918, for example, spoke "in the name of the Slovak nation in Slovakia [*slovenského národa na Slovensku*]," even as it declared that "the Slovak nation [*slovenský národ*] is linguistically and cultural-historically part of the unitary Czechoslovak nation [*čiastka i rečove i kultúrno-historicky jednotného česko-slovenského národa*]" (Martinská deklarácia 1918, 1). Even in famously unitary France, Augustin Thierry, famed historian of the French Revolution, acknowledged several "nations within the French nation [*nations au sein de la nation française*]," including "the Breton nation, the Norman nation, the Béarnaise nation, the nations of Burgundy, Aquitaine, Languedoc, Franche-Comté, Alsace. These nations [*ces nations*] distinguished, without separation, their individual existence from the great common existence" (Thierry 1835, 277). In short, constitutional documents, active politicians and prominent intellectuals frequently posit multiple nations, even if nationalism theorists have not always accounted for the phenomenon.

European opinion polls similarly reveal that a large majority of EU citizens feel multiple loyalties. The Directorate-General for Communication of the European Union has polled EU citizens about their affiliations. We consulted the Eurobarometer 508 survey, released on October 29, 2021, which asked between 504 and 1059 respondents in each EU member state how much they agreed with a series of statements on a scale of 1 to 10. The survey included separate questions asking whether respondents identified with their "ethnicity or race," region, nationality, and being European. Respondents who answered four or lower were recorded as "not identifying with," those with an answer of six or higher were recorded as "identifying with," and those who answered five were recorded as a "neither/nor." The answers for each question can be cross-referenced with answers for all other questions. Of those respondents who identified with their nationality, strong majorities also identified with their "ethnicity or race." In Belgium, for example, asking whether Belgians identify with their "ethnicity or race" presumably asks them whether they identify with being Flemish, Walloon or German. A full 83% of Belgians who identify with being Belgian also identify with their "ethnicity or race" (See Table 1).

The Eurobarometer 508 survey also reveals that large majorities of EU citizens identify both with their particularist nationality and with being European. In 15 of 26 member states, more than 90% of citizens identify themselves as

Table 1 – Multiple Loyalties among EU citizens (Eurobarometer 2021)

	Percentage of respondents who identified with a nationality and also identified with			Percentage of respondents who identified with their nationality and who did NOT identify with being European
	ethnicity or race	*region or locality*	*being European*	
Austria (n=1010)	93%	90%	88%	8%
Belgium (n=1042)	83%	78%	77%	11%
Cyprus (n=504)	95%	95%	95%	1%
Spain (n=1025)	95%	94%	96%	1%
Bulgaria (n=1053)	96%	96%	95%	2%
Czechia (n=1050)	92%	90%	88%	6%
Denmark (n=1059)	94%	91%	88%	7%
Estonia (n=1011)	94%	82%	79%	12%
Greece (n=1030)	96%	95%	94%	1%
Finland (n=1022)	95%	91%	90%	6%
France (n=1008)	93%	83%	84%	8%
Croatia (n=1051)	93%	88%	90%	6%
Hungary (n=1049)	98%	94%	95%	2%
Ireland (n=1050)	94%	89%	87%	8%
Italy (n=1024)	95%	94%	94%	2%
Lithuania (n=1049)	94%	89%	90%	4%
Luxembourg (n=550)	80%	67%	67%	17%
Latvia (n=1050)	94%	90%	88%	7%
Malta (n=552)	95%	94%	94%	4%
Netherlands (n=1029)	92%	86%	84%	8%
Poland (n=1017)	96%	96%	96%	2%
Portugal (n=1027)	96%	97%	96%	0%
Romania (n=1050)	94%	93%	93%	3%
Sweden (n=1042)	93%	82%	87%	5%
Slovenia (n=1050)	93%	91%	90%	5%
Slovakia (n=1049)	96%	96%	94%	3%

both. The percentage of citizens who identify with a particularist nationality but not with Europeanness topped 10% in only three member states, and even in Luxembourg, the member state whose citizens least identify as "European," over two-thirds of respondents claimed to be both Luxembourgish and European. While Cécile Leconte has argued that "a significant segment of Eurosceptic citizens" exhibit "a lack of identification with Europe and an exclusive sense of national identity" (Leconte 2010, 185), Eurobarometer data suggest that only a small percentage of EU citizens cherished such an exclusive sense of particularist national identity in 2021. In Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain, the percentage of respondents who identified with a particularist nationality but refused to identify as European was under 5%. In Portugal, that percentage was zero!

EU loyalty and particularist loyalty to a member state are thus compatible with each other, much as a particularist loyalty to a member state (e.g., Spain) coexists with loyalties to ethno-national communities within that state (e.g., being Catalan or Basque). Efforts to declare sub-state communities as "nationalities," "ethnicities," or some other terminological variant of the "not-quite-nation," prove a powerful tool of delegitimization, and may thus appeal to certain political actors (Maxwell, Záhořík, and Turner 2021). Scholars of nationalism have nevertheless grown accustomed to positing, discussing and analyzing simultaneous British and English/Welsh/Scottish nationalisms, simultaneous Spanish or Basque/Catalan nationalisms, and so forth. Why can they not also posit an EU nationalism coexisting with particularist nationalisms?

Conclusion: The Advantages of Theorizing an "EU nation"

The EU, in short, qualifies as a nation according to Benedict Anderson's widely-regarded definition, and scholars who choose to analyze EU politics as a form of "nationalism" have theoretical grounds for doing so. But why might scholars wish to make that choice? Let us conclude by identifying two possible benefits of applying the terms "nation" and "nationalism" to the EU: terminological simplicity and access to nationalism theory.

Refusing to acknowledge the EU as a nation forces scholars to invent bespoke analytical categories, some of which prove esoteric or confusing. We suggest, for example, that Scottish Marxist Tom Nairn did not achieve analytical clarity by characterizing the EU as "a pluri-national state of some sort: whether a kind of super-nation-state founded on 'European chauvinism' … or a 'supra-national' body presiding over existing states – or whatever" (Nairn

2003, 305). Scholars have variously characterized the EU as "not a nation but an alliance of nations," (Thomann 2019, 65), as "not a nation but an expanding cluster of nation-states that are coming together" (Rivi 2007, 2), as "not a nation, but a supranational union of national peoples" (Montani 2014, 81) or as "an interdependent continent which nevertheless is not a nation" (Pérez 2013, 2). Scholars have theorized the EU as a "supra-nation" (Williams 2010, 60), as a "supranational regional regime" (Close 2000, 15), and as the "foremost and best-developed example of a transnational structure of political authority" (Painter 2002, 108). Perceiving the EU not as a "nation" but as "a composite of nations," Oliver Gerstenberg and Charles Sabel described it as a "directly-deliberative polyarchy," defined as a structure in which "local-, or, more exactly, lower-level actors … are granted autonomy" (Gerstenberg and Sabel 2002, 291–292). Even though all of these novel analytical categories were specifically tailored to describe the EU, they do not resemble each other, and thus evidently do not generalize well. Is a "supra-nation" the same thing as an "alliance of nations"? Is a "supernational union of national peoples" the same thing as a "directly-deliberative polyarchy"?

Denying EU nationhood, furthermore, complicates not only the description of the EU itself, but also subsidiary terminologies used to analyze it. Terminological qualms have, for example, inspired awkward neologisms for the term "democracy." If democracy is the rule of the δῆμος (*dêmos*), "people," and the δῆμος is equated with the "nation," then a non-national EU encompassing multiple separate nations cannot possibly be "democratic." Kalypso Nicolaidis thus contrasted the democracy of EU member states with the EU's "demoicracy," defined as "a polity ruled by a plurality of peoples who govern together but not as one" (Nicolaidis 2015, 138). Such terminological gymnastics, we suggest, bring little insight. We suggest that if both Catalan and Spanish elections can be "democratic," if both Saxon and German elections can be "democratic," and if both Welsh elections and British elections can be "democratic," then EU elections can also be "democratic."

Analyzing the EU as a "nation" offers not only terminological simplicity, but access to the richness of nationalism theory. An extensive scholarly literature, for example, discusses national awakening, national mobilization, and so forth. Since the phrases "nation-building" or "national awakening" implicitly presuppose some sort of "nation," however, denying that the EU is a nation may prevent scholars from recognizing their applicability to the EU. Scholars can, of course, develop theories of supranational-regional-regime-building, directly-deliberative-polyarchy-awakening, and so forth. But why reinvent the wheel? Scholars studying the various processes promoting or hindering EU

integration can proceed directly to analysis by examining those processes as "nation-building."

Some scholars, perhaps, are comfortable applying the insights of nationalism theory while still describing the EU as something other than a "nation." Guido Comparato, for example, has suggested that scholars can ask whether the European Union's proponents can employ "some of the nation-building strategies that have been more or less usefully employed in the past for nation-states" without being "much interested in verifying whether something as a European nation exists" (Comparato 2014, 239).

Other scholars, however, have had qualms about applying theories of nationalism to the EU. Judith Rohde-Liebenau, for example, warned that "'Europe-building" does not necessarily mimic nation-building." Her analysis, however, alludes to a series of phenomena that nationalism scholars have studied at length, including "mass education and the mass media" and "institutional settings and a culture that binds people across social groups" (Rohde-Liebenau 2020, 506). Before German unification in 1871, for example, the careers of individual German scholars routinely crossed the frontiers of the various German states, mutually enriching much of German intellectual life, and integrating individual German states into a wider whole. Does Rohde-Liebeneu really see no theoretical possibility of analogy with ERC fellowships and the Erasmus program? Other recent initiatives have attempted to give European media some pan-European dimensions. European newspapers, for example, routinely exchange stories with each other, as illustrated by initiatives such as the Leading European Newspaper Alliance (Kreis 2017, 124). Do we want to reject even the abstract possibility of comparing these initiatives with nation-building? Even if differences may, in the end, be more striking than similarities, no insight results from the pre-emptive declaration that nationalism theory can never apply to a non-national EU.

Strong parallels between the EU's institutions and "national" institutions also suggest multiple opportunities for comparative analysis. Wolfgang Schmale noted that the EU promotes its unity through "symbols typical of a nation-state: a flag, anthem, and Europe day (analogous to national days)" (Schmale 2007, 397), and the ubiquitous flag, in particular, suggests that Michael Billig's work on "banal nationalism" can apply to the EU (Billig 1995). Euro banknotes link European consumers, and the European health insurance card, to give a less obvious example, links EU hospitals and clinics. Can these phenomena not be usefully compared to analogous developments in the bureaucratic history of other nationalizing states? In his famous study of French nationalism, Eugen Weber (1976) examined a plethora of analogous

social developments that helped transform "peasants into Frenchmen." We find it unwise to assume *a priori* that Weber's methodology and insights shed no light on analogous developments transforming citizens of member states into Europeans. More generally, thinking of the EU as a form of nationalism gives scholars access to voluminous extant literatures on different aspects of nationalism. Scholars should feel free to access them.

Given these advantages, why have so many scholars chosen not to apply nationalism theory to the EU? Some of their reluctance may arise from widespread belief in the EU's novelty and uniqueness (Fossum 2006). Scholars have variously described the EU as "an unprecedented phenomenon in supranational political economic, social, political and legal harmonization" (Eko 2012, 86), as "an unprecedented political structure," (Pérez 2009, 67), as "something completely new that differs from all previous models" (Schmidt 2000, 143), as "the first truly post-modern international political form" (Ruggie 1993, 140), as "an entirely new species of human organization, the likes of which the world has never seen" (Hill 2010, 18), and as "a unique, *sui generis* arrangement of relations and connections between various entities which exist and operate functionally at different levels of cooperation" (Wierzchowska 2020, 790). Surely an entity so unprecedented, scholars apparently assume, cannot be theorized as a new incarnation of something as familiar as nationalism.

Indeed, several scholars attempting to theorize the EU have struggled to describe it as anything other than novel. When Lucian Jora declared the EU "not a nation but a new sort of political entity which transcends the old Westphalian nation state arrangements" (Jora 2017, 116), he theorized the EU in mostly negative terms: as not a nation, as not "Westphalian." He assigned the EU only one positive attribute: the EU is "new." When Niel MacCormick described the EU as "a new kind of 'commonwealth,' which offers the hope of transcending the sovereign state rather than simply replicating it in some new super-state" (MacCormick 1999, 191), he also emphasized novelty and negative description: MacCormick's EU is neither a sovereign state, nor a super-state. Praising the EU as a "unique and pathbreaking" model for the rest of the world, Max Haller similarly described the EU as "less ambitious than … a true state," since it worked "not by establishing a central government proper" (Haller 1994, 205), but instead as either "a constitutional 'Community of Nations' or 'Community of Nation-States.'" We suggest that treating the EU as an unprecedented anomaly, *sui generis* and exceptional, impedes comparative analysis.

Other scholars, perhaps, are reluctant to posit an EU nationalism because they associate "nationalism" with the chauvinistic, xenophobic nationalism of ethnic cleansing, and genocide. Richard McMahon, arguing for a move "beyond national models," alluded to "post-modern, post-Westphalian alternatives to the national model" (McMahon 2013, 6), while Steven Hill (2010, 235) rejoiced that "the formerly tribal nations of Europe have learned a thing or two about … peace, democracy, prosperity, and sustainability." The tribalist Westphalian nationalisms of the Second World War, however, are not the only forms of nationalism. Indeed, an extensive literature has attempted to theorize a "liberal nationalism" (Tamir 1993; Auer 2004), "multicultural nationalism" (Nimni 2006; Moodod 2019), or something similar.

Rather than thinking of the EU as some non-national novelty, therefore, we suggest theorizing it as a novel form of nationalism. To those who argue that "the nations of the EU should hurriedly evolve their own political union so that the old concept of nationhood is left firmly behind" (e.g., Thynn 2000, 30), we answer that the EU might also leave the old concept of nationhood behind by evolving a new concept of nationhood.

Europhile politicians, perhaps, still have some incentives to eschew the term "nation" when discussing the EU. Our reading of Benedict Anderson might prove difficult to communicate via soundbites or Twitter. Since popular opinion does not always acknowledge multiple sovereignties, politicians invoking a "European nation" might face an undesirable political backlash. If, as Monica Condruz-Băcescu suggested, Euroscepticism arises partly from "fear of a symbolic threat to the national communities" (Condruz-Băcescu 2014, 55), then the EU's proponents may probably find it expedient to disavow EU nationhood, at least at the rhetorical level. Thus, one of the most striking features of the EU, when viewed through the lens of nationalism theory, is the extent to which its proponents avoid the term "nation" and refrain from depicting themselves as "nationalists." The EU nation conceals its nationalist character even from its own members.

Nevertheless, scholars interested in the EU cannot let categories of political practice dictate their categories of analysis. The European Union as a political structure is invoked and legitimated much as nations are invoked and legitimated. The interplay of its bureaucracy and parliament play out much like the interplay of a national bureaucracy and a national parliament. It looks like a nation, quacks like a nation, and meets Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation. Scholars should feel free to analyze the EU as a nation.

Acknowledgements

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