Imagining Europe as a Global Player

The Ideological Construction of
a New European Identity within the EU

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Introduction

> If we are to keep pace with this changing world and shoulder our growing global responsibilities, we, as the Union, have to take the necessary measures. If we want to satisfy the rising expectations and hopes of countries abroad and the peoples of Europe, we have to become a real global player. We are only beginning to act as one.
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> (Prodi 2002, SP/02/619)

The statement above is from a speech in which Commission President, Romano Prodi in 2002 set out his ambitions for what was later to be entitled the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The ambitions which he presents in this passage are however clearly beyond the confines of the ENP, indeed beyond the scope of any particular policy or concrete political goal. They concern the need for EUrope[1] to assume a new identity – that of a *Global Player*. This new identity is a new European project, because as Prodi makes clear it is as yet unrealised. Hinted at in this short passage is also the forces which push this new European project into existence; they are both internal and external. Both a need to handle the rapidly changing world as it encroaches on Europe, and a European responsibility which is nothing less than global: a rising tide of expectations and hopes which from both within and without apparently look to Europe for their satisfaction. Europe needs a new identity, because there is a need – a desire even – for a new Europe; a Global Player Europe.

This book is about the discursive construction of a new "Global Player" identity for Europe as it appears in the official rhetoric and documents of the EU between 2001 and 2007[2]. A main claim is that the construction of Global Player Europe rests heavily on what I call the "Unity in Diversity" construction of European identity. Whereas the Unity in Diversity construction portrays Europe as an internal continen-

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[1] I borrow the designation "Europe" from Kalypso Nicholaidis and use it to designate the subject of arguments which logically pertain only to the EU, but which are made in the name of "Europe" (Nicholaidis 2005).

[2] More specifically it is an analysis of EU documents and speeches by EU Commissioners and the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, commencing with the issuing of the Laeken Declaration "on the future of the European Union", on the 15th of December 2001 and concluding with the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Rome treaty in the early spring of 2007.

tal project, Global Player Europe gives this construction an external dimension; a new European project and purpose in the realm of foreign policy. The European Neighbourhood Policy – launched in late 2002 – was almost from its inception imagined to be the concrete framework through which this new identity as a Global Player could be exercised.

It should be made clear that my focus is so to speak on the "producers" of European identity discourses, rather than on it potential "consumers"[3]. My ambition is not to investigate how "the Europeans as such" – a fragmented and unruly object of investigation to say the least – relate to EUrope or to gauge the level of their identification with it. It is nevertheless interesting that when such a collective diagnosis is attempted the problem that it most often identifies is that the citizens do not *feel* anything for EUrope. In other words that there remains a stark difference between the emotional bonds upheld to national identities and the rational – if not cynical – interest calculations through which the project of European integration is perceived. As Anthony D. Smith's has famously remarked; "Who would die for Europe?" (Smith 1998: 139). Europe is apparently a political project unable to produce a discourse about itself which gets to "'the hearts' and 'the guts' of the peoples of Europe" (Stavrakakis 2007: 225-226). In this light Europe suffers from a deficit of "feeling".

And yet much of both the political and academic discussion about how to remedy this focuses on a lack of knowledge. The implicit claim is that in order for the citizens to become truly "European" they must be educated about the myriad ways in which the Union's institutions and directives cater to their (personal) interests, secures their (individual) political rights or open up unique opportunities for their (specific) goals and ambitions. From such a perspective the "official rhetoric" of the EU is of course utterly irrelevant. What matters to academics, politicians and citizens alike – is the "reality" of the thing and not the hopelessly bloated, self-satisfied and emotional hyperbole of speeches and declarations seeming pouring out in an ever increasing flood of words. I am not denying that identification born from knowledge and self-interest can be powerful. But it is ironic that it should be posed as a remedy for what is most often identified exactly as a deficit to do with feeling.

My position is instead that the rhetorical and discursive construction of Europe is indeed both relevant and important. The European Union – not to mention the wider idea of "Europe", whose name the Union

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[3] This division is used here only for clarity. It is in fact both crude and theoretically untenable. When it comes to identity and discourse there is not any neat line between producing and consuming. The speaking subject is inscribed in discourse just as his potential interlocutors are. The Commissioners in this sense might equally well be described as an elite group of "European identity" consumers.

imprudently borrows as much as possible – must be constructed in language, before it can be related to as an objective institutional and judicial "reality". It is – like the nation or any other community too big to facilitate the simultaneous bodily proximity of all its members – an imagined community (Anderson 1983). And it is in its public rhetorical self-description that the specific style in which it is imagined becomes most clear. It is in this sphere that the political project produces an image of itself meant to elicit the identification of the citizens. This is where one can analyse the political attempt to make them *feel* something.

My primary interest is exactly in how official discourses about European identity seek to elicit an identification with the political projects of Europe at the level of affect and emotion. This is one of the reasons why I speak of the construction of an "ideological identity" for Europe. Ideology is not about rational argumentation, interest calculations or negotiated compromises. It is about eliciting an affectual, enjoyable and enthusiastic adherence to a communal cause or project felt to be grander than oneself. In ideology we are made to feel something.

My approach therefore includes but also attempts to go beyond the traditional discourse analytical concern with meaning; with the semantics and conceptual architecture of a given field, object or identity. In order to locate the dimension of affect and emotion in the discourses, I attempt to identify the structures through which one is invited to *enjoy* a European identity. In doing so I draw inspiration diverse fields and theories such as Ernesto Laclau's discourse theory, Lacanian psychoanalysis and theories about political myth. The first part of the book is occupied with constructing the necessary theoretical framework to carry through such an ambition.

In the second part I analyse the construction of European identity in the form which I call Unity in Diversity Europe. I argue that the identity is semantically organised around an idea of common European values and that it presents European integration as a grand departure from a common past of war and suffering. EUrope in a sense becomes the framework through which the Europeans were finally able to leave a barbaric history behind and "civilise themselves". This construction seeks to elicit emotional identification around the call of "Never again!" It invites the citizens to take part in a grand struggle to make war and genocide forever impossible in Europe.

The third part deals with "Global Player Europe". Initially however I argue that the increasing prominence of this new construction must be understood in connection with a specific set of problems encountered by Unity in Diversity Europe. Its ideological project of preventing the re-emergence of war in Europe suffers from its own success. War is in fact

perceived as *de facto* impossible in Europe. The Global Player construction re-focuses the grand common project towards the external realm; towards a world which is portrayed in the rhetoric as longing and hoping for Europe. Here the Europeans are invited to enjoy their European identity, by imagining the admiring and desiring gazes from abroad. However the analysis will not entirely remain at the level of grand ideological constructions. In the final chapter, I analyse how ideology "works" at the level of a concrete policy. Namely how the ideological construction of European identity in the form of "Global Player Europe", expressed itself in the concrete formulation and implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Conceived in 2002 as a policy which would spread European values in the immediate vicinity of the Union, the ENP was infused from the beginning with a rhetoric clearly connecting it to the identity of Europe as a Global Player. But the ENP was in no way simply a neutral medium through which Europe's new identity could be showcased. Rather the ideological "fundamentals" or "universals" here encounter a specific context with an irreducible particularity of its own. This meant that the ideological structure of Global Player Europe, in its very application, had to be bent and sometimes seemingly even broken, in order to legitimate the ENP in the face of what seemed like a flood of problems, challenges and compromises arising from the different particular identities, priorities and power-relationships of the concrete context that it now had to navigate.

Focusing on the ENP allows me to observe in more general terms how ideological structures must always be negotiated in relation to the concrete context of their application. How, in other words, identity must always be performed, and how such performance is never an exact replication of the discursive framework of meanings that it enacts, but must always be an interpretation of identity in relation to the particular demands of the context of the performance.