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## Social Constructivism and European Integration

Thomas Risse

### Introduction

Social constructivism reached the study of the European Union (EU) in the late 1990s. The publication of a *Journal of European Public Policy* special issue in 1999 marks a turning point in this regard (Christiansen *et al.* 1999; but see Jørgensen 1997). Social constructivism entered the field of EU studies mainly as a 'spillover' from the discipline of international relations, but also because of profound misgivings among scholars about the rather narrow focus and sterility of the debates between neofunctionalism and (liberal) intergovernmentalism. Research inspired by social constructivism contributes substantially to European integration studies, both theoretically and substantially. This chapter proceeds in the following steps. First, I introduce social constructivism as an approach to the study of European integration and a challenge to more rationalist approaches such as liberal intergovernmentalism, but also versions of neofunctionalism. Second, I take a closer look at the question of European identity as a particular subject area to which research inspired by social constructivism can contribute. Third, the chapter discusses constructivist contributions to the study of EU enlargement. I conclude with remarks on the future of European integration research inspired by social constructivism.

### Social Constructivism as an Approach to European Integration

There is considerable confusion in the field of European studies as to what precisely constitutes social constructivism and what distinguishes it from other approaches to European integration. As a result, it has become fairly common to introduce constructivism as yet another substantive theory of regional integration, such as liberal intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik 1993; see also Chapter 4 of this volume by Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig) or neofunctionalism (E.B. Haas 1958; see also Chapter 3 of this volume). It should be emphasized at the outset that social constructivism as such does not make any substantive claims about European integration. Constructivists may join an intergovernmentalist reading of interstate negotiations as the central way to understand the EU. They

may equally join the neofunctionalist crowd, emphasizing spillover effects and the role of supranational institutions (see e.g. E.B. Haas 2001), and constructivists could certainly contribute to the study of the EU as a multilevel governance system and to an institutional interpretation of its functioning (see Chapters 5 and 7 of this volume).

It is equally misleading to claim, as some have argued, that social constructivism subscribes to a 'post-positivist' epistemology (how can we know something?), while conventional approaches are wedded to positivism and the search for law-like features in social and political life. Unfortunately, terms such as 'positivism' are often used as demarcation devices to distinguish the 'good self' from the 'bad other' in some sort of disciplinary tribal warfare (for an excellent discussion of this tendency in international relations theory see Wight 2002). However, if post-positivism means, first, a healthy scepticism toward a 'covering law' approach to social science irrespective of time and space and instead a striving towards middle-range theorizing, second, an emphasis on interpretive understanding as an intrinsic, albeit not exclusive, part of any causal explanation, and, third, the recognition that social scientists are part of the social world which they try to analyse: double hermeneutics see Giddens (1982), then—is anybody still a 'positivist' (to paraphrase an article by Legro and Moravcsik [1999]; for an excellent introduction to constructivist research strategies see Klotz and Lynch [2007])? In sum, positivism and post-positivism is not what distinguishes social constructivism from rational choice. Rather, an epistemological divide between those who deny the possibility of intersubjectively valid knowledge claims, on the one hand, and those who stick to more or less conventional methods in the social sciences, on the other, is increasingly salient within the constructivist field itself. It is epistemology rather than ontology (what is the nature of things?) that distinguishes more radical from more moderate constructivists (see Chapter 9 by Ole Wæver in this volume; also Wiener 2003; for different epistemological positions compare the articles in Checkel 2005 with Diez 2001; Manners 2007).

### Defining Social Constructivism

So what then is 'social constructivism' (for the following see e.g. Adler 1997, 2002; Fearon and Wendt 2002; Wendt 1999; Christiansen *et al.* 2001)? It is a truism that social reality does not fall from heaven, but that human agents construct and reproduce it through their daily practices—Berger and Luckmann called this 'the social construction of reality' (Berger and Luckmann 1966). While this is a core argument of social constructivism, it does not provide us with a clear enough definition. Therefore, it is probably most useful to describe constructivism as based on a social ontology which insists that human agents do not exist independently from their social environment and its collectively shared systems of meanings (culture in a broad sense). This is in contrast to the methodological individualism of rational choice according to which '[t]he elementary unit of social life is the individual human action' (Elster 1989: 13). The fundamental insight of the structure-agency debate, which lies at the heart of many social constructivist works, is not only that social structures and agents are mutually codetermined. The crucial point is that constructivists insist on the mutual *constitutiveness* of (social) structures and agents (Adler 1997: 324–5; Wendt 1999: ch. 4). The social environment in which we find ourselves,

defines (constitutes) who we are, our identities as social beings. 'We' are social beings, embedded in various relevant social communities. At the same time, human agency creates, reproduces, and changes culture through our daily practices. Thus, social constructivism occupies a sometimes uneasy ontological middleground between individualism and structuralism by claiming that there are properties of structures and of agents that cannot be collapsed into each other (see also Adler 1997).

This claim has important, if often overlooked, repercussions for the study of the European Union. The prevailing theories of European integration—whether neofunctionalism, liberal intergovernmentalism, or multilevel governance<sup>1</sup>—are firmly committed to a rationalist ontology which is agency-centred by definition (see E.B. Haas's recent interpretation of neofunctionalism in Haas 2001). This might be helpful for substantive empirical research, as long as we are primarily in the business of explaining the evolution of European institutions. If institution-building and, thus, the emergence of new social structures are to be explained, agency-centred approaches are doing just fine. Here, a constructivist perspective will complement rather than substitute these approaches by emphasizing that the interests of actors cannot be treated as exogenously given or inferred from a given material structure. Rather, political culture, discourse and the 'social construction' of interests and identities matter.

Take the debate on the future of the European Union as it has evolved from the 1990s onwards. Do the German and French contrasting visions of a future European political order reflect some underlying economic or geopolitical interests? If this were the case, we would expect most French politicians to plead for a federalist vision of the EU, since France should be obviously interested in binding a powerful Germany as firmly as possible to Europe. In contrast, most German contributors should embrace a 'Europe of nation states', as a means to gaining independence from the constraining effects of European integration. Thus, an emphasis on material power as well as economic or security interests would mis-predict the positions in the current debate. Those positions, however, can be explained as reflecting competing visions of a good political and socio-economic order which are deeply embedded in the two countries' contrasting domestic structures and political cultures (for empirical evidence see Jachtenfuchs 2002; Jachtenfuchs *et al.* 1998).

Yet such an emphasis on ideational, cultural, and discursive origins of national preferences complements rather than substitutes an agency-based rationalist account. 'Soft rationalism', which takes ideas seriously, should be able to accommodate some of these concerns (see e.g. Goldstein and Keohane 1993; Moravcsik 1997). The more we insist that institutions including the EU are never created from scratch, but reflect and build upon previous institutional designs and structures, the further we move away from rational choice approaches, even of the 'soft' variety. The issue is not so much about path-dependent processes and 'sunk costs' as emphasized by historical institutionalism (Pierson 1996), but about institutional effects on social identities and fundamental interests of actors. Thus, a constructivist history of the EU would insist against liberal intergovernmentalism in particular, that we cannot even start explaining the coming about of the major constitutional treaties of the union without taking the feedback effects of previous institutional decisions on the identities and interests of the member states' governments and societies into account. Finally, such a rewritten history of the

EU would focus on the ongoing struggles, contestations, and discourses on how 'to build Europe' over the years and, thus, reject an imagery of actors including governments as calculating machines who always know what they want and are never uncertain about the future and even their own stakes and interests (see, for example, Parsons 2003 against Moravcsik 1998).

The differences between constructivism and a liberal intergovernmentalist approach to European integration are, thus, pretty clear as the latter is usually based on a rationalist ontology that takes actors' preferences as given. It is less clear, though, how constructivism differs from neofunctionalism. On the one hand, neofunctionalism constitutes an actor-centred approach to European integration (see E.B. Haas 1958, 2001; for a discussion see Risse 2005). It starts with egoistic utility-maximizing actors who cooperate to solve some collective action problems. At some point, the functional logic takes over (spillover) leading to further integration. On the other hand, neofunctionalism also talks about normative integration, the 'upgrading of common interests', and the shift of loyalties (identities) from the national to the supranational levels. This latter language implies some constitutive effects of European integration on the various societal and political actors. If European integration is supposed to transform collective identities, we have moved beyond a narrow rational choice approach and toward a much 'thicker' understanding of institutions, as Ernst Haas himself has recognized (see e.g. E.B. Haas 2001; E.B. Haas and P.M. Haas 2002). In sum, there are aspects to neofunctionalist accounts that resonate pretty well with a constructivist focus on the constitutive rather than the purely regulative impact of norms.

### Agency, Structure, and the Constitutive Effect of Norms

The constructivist emphasis on the mutual constitutiveness of agency and structure becomes even more relevant for the study of European integration, the more we focus on the *impact* of Europeanization on the member states and their domestic policies, politics and polities. Recent work on European integration has started to look at the various ways in which the integration process itself feeds back into the domestic fabric of the nation states (e.g. Cowles *et al.* 2001; Kohler-Koch and Eising 1999; Héritier *et al.* 2001; Börzel and Risse 2007). Thus, European integration studies increasingly analyse the EU as a two-way process of policy-making and institution-building at the European level which then feed back into the member states and their political processes and structures. It is here that the difference between the methodological individualism emphasized by rational choice, on the one hand, and the constructivist focus on the mutual constitutiveness of agency and structures matters a lot.

The reason can be found in the way in which social constructivists conceptualize institutions as social structures impacting on agents and their behaviour. Rationalist (or 'neoliberal' in international relations jargon, see Keohane 1989) institutionalism views social institutions including the EU as primarily constraining the behaviour of actors with given identities and preferences. These actors follow a 'logic of consequentialism' (March and Olsen 1989, 1998) enacting given identities and interests and trying to realise their preferences through strategic behaviour. The goal of action is to maximize or to optimize one's interests and preferences. Institutions constrain or widen the range of choices

available to actors to realize their interests. The EU's liberalization of telecommunications markets, for example, broke up state monopolies while empowering foreign companies to penetrate the markets of their competitors.

In contrast, social constructivism and sociological institutionalism emphasize a different logic of action, which March and Olsen have called the 'logic of appropriateness':

Human actors are imagined to follow rules that associate particular identities to particular situations, approaching individual opportunities for action by assessing similarities between current identities and choice dilemmas and more general concepts of self and situations.

March and Olsen (1998: 951)

Rule-guided behaviour differs from strategic and instrumental behaviour in that actors try to 'do the right thing' rather than maximizing or optimizing their given preferences. The logic of appropriateness entails that actors try to figure out the appropriate rule in a given social situation. It follows that social institutions including the EU can no longer be viewed as 'external' to actors. Rather, actors including corporate actors such as national governments, firms, or interest groups are deeply embedded in and affected by the social institutions in which they act.

This relates to what constructivists call the *constitutive* effects of social norms and institutions (Onuf 1989; Kratochwil 1989). Many social norms not only regulate behaviour, they also constitute the identity of actors in the sense of defining who 'we' are as members of a social community. The norm of sovereignty, for example, not only regulates the interactions of states in international affairs, it also defines what a state *is* in the first place. Constructivists concentrate on the social identities of actors in order to account for their interests (e.g. Wendt 1999, particularly ch. 7; also Checkel 2001a). Constructivism maintains that collective norms and understandings define the basic 'rules of the game' in which they find themselves in their interactions. This does not mean that constitutive norms cannot be violated or never change, but the argument implies that we cannot even describe the properties of social agents without reference to the social structure in which they are embedded.

Consequently, the EU as an emerging polity is expected not just to constrain the range of choices available to, say, nation states, but the way in which they define their interests and even their identities. EU 'membership matters' (Sandholtz 1996) in that it influences the very way in which actors see themselves and are seen by others as social beings. Germany, France, Italy, or the Netherlands are no longer simply European states. They are EU states in the sense that their statehood is increasingly defined by their EU membership. The EU constitutes states in Europe insofar as it maps the political, social, and economic space enabling private and public actors to define their interests and go about their business (Laffan *et al.* 2000; Jönsson *et al.* 2000; see also Risse 2009). EU membership implies the voluntary acceptance of a particular political order as legitimate and entails the recognition of a set of rules and obligations as binding. This includes that European law is the 'law of the land', and, thus, a constitutional order 'without constitution', at least for the time being (Weiler 1995; Shaw 2001b). Thus, constructivists emphasize that the EU deeply affects discursive and behavioural practices, that it has become part of the 'social furniture' with which social and political actors have to deal on a daily basis. Such

a view implies that EU membership entails socialization effects (Checkel 2001b, 2005). At the very least, actors need to know the rules of appropriate behaviour in the union and to take them for granted in the sense that 'norms become normal'.

Constructivist emphasis on norm-guided behaviour and constitutive rules does not imply, however, that norms are never violated. Any study of the implementation of the *acquis communautaire* shows that compliance rates vary significantly among member states and across issue areas (Börzel 2001; Börzel *et al.* 2007). Acceptance of a social and political order as legitimate might increase compliance rates with the law. However, we all occasionally run a red light. Does this mean that we do not accept the rule as binding and valid? Of course not. We can infer from the communicative practices of actors whether or not they consider a norm as legitimate. Do they try to justify their behaviour in cases of rule violation? Do they recognize misbehaviour and offer compensation?

### Communication and Discourse

The emphasis on communicative and discursive practices constitutes a final characteristic feature of social constructivist approaches. If we want to understand and explain social behaviour, we need to take words, language, and communicative utterances seriously. It is through discursive practices that agents make sense of the world and attribute meaning to their activities. Moreover, as Foucault reminds us, discursive practices establish power relationships in the sense that they make us 'understand certain problems in certain ways, and pose questions accordingly' (Diez 2001: 90). And further, '[a]lthough it is "we" who impose meaning, "we" do not act as autonomous subjects but from a "subject position" made available by the discursive context in which we are situated' (*ibid.*, referring to Foucault 1991: 58).

There are at least three ways in which the study of communicative practices has recently contributed to our understanding of the European Union. First, some scholars have started applying the Habermasian theory of communicative action to international relations (Habermas 1981, 1992a; Müller 1994; Risse 2000). They focus on arguing and reason-giving as an agency-centred mode of interaction which enables actors to challenge the validity claims inherent in any causal or normative statement and to seek a communicative consensus about their understanding of a situation as well as justifications for the principles and norms guiding their action, rather than acting purely on the basis of strategic calculations. Argumentative rationality means that the participants in a discourse are open to be persuaded by the better argument and that relationships of power and social hierarchies recede in the background. Argumentative and deliberative behaviour is as goal-oriented as strategic interactions, however the goal is not to attain one's fixed preferences, but to seek a reasoned consensus. As Keohane put it, persuasion 'involves changing people's choices of alternatives independently of their calculations about the strategies of other players' (Keohane 2001: 10). Actors' interests, preferences, and the perceptions of the situation are no longer fixed, but subject to discursive challenges. Where argumentative rationality prevails, actors do not seek to maximize or to satisfy their given interests and preferences, but to challenge and to justify the validity

claims inherent in them—and are prepared to change their views of the world or even their interests in light of the better argument.

Applied to the European Union, this emphasis on communicative action allows us to study European institutions as discourse rather than merely bargaining arenas allowing for deliberative processes to establish a reasoned consensus in order to solve common problems. Joerges and Neyer in particular have used this concept to study the EU comitology (Joerges and Neyer 1997b; Neyer 2002), while Checkel has emphasized persuasion and social learning in various settings of the EU and other European institutions (Checkel 2001b). Göler has examined deliberative processes at the EU's Constitutional Convention (Göler 2006; see also Kleine and Risse 2007; Risse and Kleine 2007).

The second way in which discursive practices have been studied in the EU does not so much focus on arguing and reason-giving, but on discourse as a process of meaning construction allowing for certain interpretations while excluding others (see also Chapter 9 this volume). In other words, this work focuses on discursive practices as means by which power relationships are established and maintained. Who is allowed to speak in a discursive arena, what counts as a sensible proposition, and which meaning constructions become so dominant that they are being taken for granted? Rosamond's work on European discourses on globalization has to be mentioned here as well as Diez's study of the British discourse on European integration (Rosamond 2001; Diez 1999b, 2001; see also Larsen 1999).

The latter work is related to the more radical versions of social constructivism mentioned above which conclude from the 'linguistic turn' in international relations (cf. Milliken 1999; Fierke 2002; Wiener 2003) that claims to knowledge in the social science have to be considered as rather questionable. However, these distinctions should not be exaggerated. When it comes to actual empirical research, most scholars of 'discourse analysis' still use rather conventional methods of qualitative content analysis to make their points (compare Larsen 1999; Marcussen 2000; Jachtenfuchs *et al.* 1998; Marcussen *et al.* 1999; for a general argument see Klotz and Lynch 2007).

A third way in which communicative practices have recently become the focus of attention for EU scholars concerns the emergence of a transnational European public sphere. Over the past 10 years empirical studies, particularly media analyses, investigated the extent to which we can observe the gradual Europeanization of national public spheres (see e.g. Kantner 2004; Pfetsch 2004; Trenz 2006; Van de Steeg 2006; Fossum and Schlesinger 2007; Koopmans 2007; Meyer 2007; Sifft *et al.* 2007; for an overview see Risse 2009). In this context, Eder and Kantner have suggested that the ability to communicate meaningfully across borders depends crucially on the extent to which the same issues are debated at the same time with similar frames of reference or meaning structures (Eder and Kantner 2000). Transnational contestation and politicization of European issues only become possible if we share frames of interpretation so that we understand each other. In a way then, the emergence of a transnational public sphere is a social construction par excellence. It only exists insofar as participants in the debate discuss European issues of common concern thereby creating a transnational community of communication (Risse and Van de Steeg forthcoming).

### The Three Contributions of Social Constructivism

In sum, there are at least three ways in which social constructivism contributes to a better understanding of the European Union. First, accepting the mutual constitutiveness of agency and structure allows for a deeper understanding of Europeanization including its impact on statehood in Europe. Second and related, emphasizing the constitutive effects of European law, rules, and policies enables us to study how European integration shapes social identities and interests of actors. Third, focusing on communicative practices permits us to examine more closely how Europe and the EU are constructed discursively, how actors try to come to grips with the meaning of European integration and how they develop a European public sphere.

In the following, I apply these rather abstract arguments to the question of European identity, which is highly relevant for the construction of Europe in both political and analytical terms.

## The Social Construction of European Identity

### The Contested Nature of European Identity

Most people agree that a viable and legitimate European polity requires some degree of identification in order to be sustainable, but European identity is a contested idea.<sup>2</sup> Many people still discuss the relationship between European and national identities in zero-sum terms. They follow *essentialist* concepts of collective identities, taking cultural variables such as membership in ethnic groups as a given which then develop into national identities during the process of nation-building. If the causal connection between 'culture' and 'identity' is seen as a one-way street, there is not much one can do about this and supranational or post-nationalist identities are almost impossible. Collective identities will firmly rest with the nation state as the historically most successful connection between territory and people. French will remain French, while British remain British, and Germans remain Germans. 'Euro-pessimists' challenge the prospects for further European integration on precisely these grounds. They argue that a European polity is impossible, because there is no European people, no common European history or common myths on which collective European identity could be built (see Kielmansegg 1996; Grimm 1995).

Yet we know from survey data and other empirical material that individuals hold multiple social identities. As a result, people can feel a sense of belonging to Europe, their nation state, their gender, and so forth. It is wrong to conceptualize European identity in zero-sum terms, as if an increase in European identity necessarily decreases one's loyalty to national or other communities. Europe and the nation are both 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991) and people can feel as part of both communities without having to choose some primary identification. Analyses from survey data suggest and social psychological experiments confirm that many people who strongly identify with

their nation state also feel a sense of belonging to Europe (Duchesne and Frogner 1995; Martinotti and Steffanizzi 1995; Citrin and Sides 2004; Hooghe and Marks 2005).

This finding is trivial for scholars studying collective identities, but it nevertheless has important implications for the political debates about Europe and the nation state. Take the debates about the future of the European Union. Many people still hold that Europe lacks a *demos*, one indicator being the lack of strong identification with Europe in mass public opinion. Yet 'country first, but Europe, too' is the dominant outlook in most EU member states, and people do not perceive this as contradictory. Moreover and more importantly, the real cleavage in mass public opinion is between those who exclusively identify with their nation (exclusive nationalists), on the one hand, and those perceiving themselves as attached to both their nation and Europe (inclusive nationalists), on the other hand. Interestingly enough, citizens from the new eastern European member states do not differ much in their attitudes toward European identity from their counterparts in 'old Europe'. In addition, Citrin and Sides as well as Hooghe and Marks have demonstrated that the individual willingness to support further European integration increases quite dramatically from the former to the latter group (Citrin and Sides 2004; Hooghe and Marks 2005; see also McLaren 2006). They argue, therefore, 'that creating support for a stronger European state does not require a European identity that dominates national identity' (Citrin and Sides 2004: 175). In other words, the European polity does not require a 'demos' that replaces a national with a European identity, but one in which national and European identities coexist and complement each other. This is a significant empirical finding that speaks directly to the debate on the future of the union.

Most scholars working on collective identities today have abandoned essentialist conceptualizations of social identities, but embrace versions of social constructivist reasoning (see e.g. Giesen 1993, 1999; Eder and Giesen 1999; Cederman 2001). From this perspective, the connection between cultural variables such as ethnic belongings or religious or ideological affiliations, on the one hand, and collective identities, on the other, is more historically contingent, tenuous, and subject to constructions and reconstructions. Accordingly, social identities contain, first, ideas describing and categorizing an individual's membership in a social group or community including emotional, affective, and evaluative components. Common Europeanness, for example, could constitute such a community. Second, this commonness is accentuated by a sense of difference with regard to other communities. Individuals frequently tend to view the group with which they identify in a more positive way than the 'out-group', but a sense of collective European identity is always accompanied by the need to differentiate 'Europeans' from 'others', be it Soviet Communism during the Cold War, Islamic fundamentalism, or Anglo-American *laissez-faire* capitalism.

### **'Europeanness' and National Identities**

Thus, there might be much more 'Europeanness' enshrined in national cultures and, hence, a much stronger collective European identity than is usually assumed. This identification process might encompass a much longer—and probably also more contested—history than the 40 years of European integration (see below), but we need to go beyond the rather simple insight that European and national identities can go together.

The question is how multiple identities relate to each other. First, identities can be *nested* or layered, conceived of as concentric circles or onions, one layer above the next. My identity as a Rhinelander is nested in my German identity, which is again nested in my Europeanness. Second, identities can be *cross-cutting*. In this configuration, some, but not all, members of one identity group are also members of another identity group. Some women might feel a strong gender identity, but only a subgroup of them might also identify with Europe, while the latter group also encompasses women without a strong sense of gender identity.

There is a third way of conceptualizing the relationship between European and other identities that people might hold. We could call it the 'marble cake' model of multiple identities. Accordingly, the various components of an individual's identity cannot be neatly separated on different levels as both concepts of nestedness and of cross-cutting identities imply. What if identity components influence each other, mesh and blend into each other? What if my self-understanding as German inherently contains aspects of Europeanness? Can we really separate out a Catalan from a European identity? Or take the major European party families. From the 1950s on, Christian Democratic parties in continental Europe were at the forefront of European integration. Europeanness has always been a constitutive component of post-Second World War Christian Democratic ideology originating from the inter-war period. The same holds true for modern Social Democrats in Europe. It is interesting to note that the turn toward accepting capitalism and the social market economy which the German Social Democrats experienced in the late 1950s, the French Socialists in the early 1980s, and British Labour in the 1990s, went hand in hand with a strong identification with European integration (although conceptualized in different ways) in each of these cases. Today, Europeanness forms a constitutive part of modern Social Democratic ideology (for details see Marcussen *et al.* 1999; Risse 2001).

### Contested Meanings of Europe and the EU

What does it mean in substantive terms to identify with Europe and the EU? A most important corollary of the marble cake concept concerns the content of what it means to identify with Europe. Different groups might fill it with different content. Indeed, a longitudinal study of political discourses about Europe among the major parties in France, Germany, and Great Britain revealed that the meaning of Europe varied considerably (Marcussen *et al.* 1999). For the German political elites, 'Europe' and the European integration meant overcoming one's own nationalist and militarist past. The French elites, in contrast, constructed Europe as the externalization of distinct French values of Republicanism, enlightenment, and the *mission civilisatrice*. While French and German political elites managed to embed Europe into their understandings of national identity, the British elites constructed Europe in contrast to their understandings of the nation, particularly the English nation.

Yet elite discourses on Europe and the EU appear to converge on a vision of European identity that encompasses the values of modernity and enlightenment. 'Unity in diversity' as well as democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and social market economy (as opposed to laissez-faire capitalism) are constructed as what is special about the EU. Thus,

European institutions and European elites deliberately try to construct a post-national civic identity in the Habermasian sense (Habermas 1994, 1996a), and this modern and post-national European identity seems to resonate with mass public opinion. The 'inclusive nationalists' who show some degree of identification with Europe also share the modern values. The more people identify with Europe, the less xenophobic and the more positive toward Eastern enlargement they are (Citrin and Sides 2004; Bruter 2005; McLaren 2006). Education, income, and (left) ideology all have a positive impact on levels of attachment to Europe.

Thus, modern and post-national values have become constitutive for the EU, as you cannot become a member without subscribing to them. As the enlargement debates show, the self-description of the EU and the dominant discourses surrounding it have moved quite a long way toward building a polity and going beyond simple market integration (see also Laffan *et al.* 2000). The EU as an active identity builder has successfully achieved identity hegemony in terms of increasingly defining what it means to belong to 'Europe' (Laffan 2004). EU membership has significant constitutive effects on European state identities. States in Europe are increasingly defined as EU members, non-members, or would-be members. Their status in Europe, and to some degree also worldwide, depends on these categories. There is no way that European states can ignore the EU, even such devoted non-members as Switzerland.

In this sense, the EU has achieved identity hegemony in Europe. In the context of Eastern enlargement, central and eastern European (CEE) states want to 'return to Europe', as if they were currently outside the continent. When Italy prepared itself for entering the Euro zone, the main slogan was 'entrare l'Europa' (entering Europe!) as if Italy—one of the six founding members of the European Community—had ever left it (Sbragia 2001). In these contexts, Europe is used synonymously with the EU. To the extent that people identify Europe with the EU, this would be a remarkable achievement of 40 years of European integration. If Europe and the EU are used interchangeably, it means that the latter has successfully occupied the social space of what it means to be European. One could then not be a 'real' European without being an EU member. The EU increasingly fills the meaning space of Europe with a specific content.

However, and in sharp contrast to the modern image of Europe that the EU wants to convey, we can also see the emergence of an alternative vision of European identity—'fortress Europe' (see particularly Checkel and Katzenstein 2008). This conceptualization of European identity emphasizes Europe's cultural heritage, a common history, and a grounding in a Christian-Judean culture (see also Bruter 2005 on Europe as a 'cultural entity'). In this context, Europe and the EU are constructed as exclusionary entities that are only open to white Christians while hostile to foreigners, immigrants, and—particularly—to Islam. This counter-vision of Europe as an exclusionary construct is increasingly being promoted by Eurosceptical and right-wing populist parties which are on the rise across the EU (on Euroscepticism see e.g. Hooghe and Marks 2007). It resonates with 'exclusive nationalist' attitudes identified in mass public opinion which also correlate strongly with hostility toward immigrants and foreigners (Citrin and Sides 2004).

The counter-vision of 'fortress Europe' has recently become salient in two transnational debates. First, there is a European-wide concern about immigration and the influx of extra-EU foreigners (see Lahav 2004). Second, the debate on the potential Turkish

EU membership is replete with references toward competing visions of Europe (see e.g. Wimmel 2006; Yavuz 2006; McLaren 2007; Goren and Nachmani 2007; Madeker 2008). On the one hand, the vision of modern Europe would, of course, open the doors to Turkish accession, as long as Turkey complies with the Copenhagen criteria of democracy, human and minority rights and the rule of law. On the other hand, 'exclusive Europe' cannot accept Turkey into the EU, because it is a predominantly Muslim country. Europe's cultural identity is constructed in essentialist terms in the anti-Turkish discourse and resembles what Eisenstadt and Giesen have called primordial identity constructions (Eisenstadt and Giesen 1995). While these are still social constructions, they resemble ethno-nationalist identities in the sense that they cannot be changed. As a result, the door to Turkish EU membership would remain closed for good.

These latter remarks also show another feature in the construction of collective identities. Social identities not only describe what it means to be member of a community, they also connote the boundaries of the group, i.e., who is 'in' and who is 'out' (Neumann 1996a, b). As a result, we can infer quite a bit about the substance of European identity, if we know more about the European 'others'. For fortress Europe, the out-group is pretty clear: it is Islam as well as non-white foreigners.

In contrast, modern, enlightened, and post-national Europe has 'fuzzy boundaries', since this identity construction cannot rely on clear cultural and/or geographical borders. Where does 'modern Europe' end? Why should Poland be 'in', while neighbouring Ukraine remains 'out'? Why accept the western Balkans, at least in principle, but rejecting Turkey? And what about the southern Mediterranean countries?

In fact, Europe is already characterized by overlapping and unclear boundaries. The European Economic and Monetary Union with the single currency encompasses 13 of the currently 27 EU member states. The European Single Market, which includes the European Economic Area (EEA), encompasses some non-EU members such as Norway. 'Schengenland' with its absence of internal border controls, has even more complicated borders, since it includes the non-member Norway, but not the EU member Great Britain.

Moreover, the 'other' of modern and post-national Europe is very much context-dependent. In the discourse centring around the European welfare state and the European social model, we find repeated references to the US and to Japan as European 'others' (Rosamond 2001). The discourse about the EU's foreign and security policy as a civilian or 'normative' power also constructs the US as its 'other' (cf. Diez 2005; Sjørusen 2006a). In the German discourse on the future of European integration, Germany's own past of militarism and nationalism constituted the European other against which the European integration project was to be built (Risse 2001). In a similar way, many of the new central and eastern European member states constructed their own Communist past as the 'European other'. In sum, modern Europe has many 'others' that are referred to and represented in context-dependent ways. This does not mean at all that anything goes, but it warns us not to reify the concept of European identity and to fix its meaning once and for all.

This short survey of current research on European identity demonstrates how one would approach a crucial issue for the future of Europe from a social constructivist perspective. Four points need to be reiterated here. First, questions such as European identity,

which are usually bracketed by conventional approaches to European integration, assume centre stage in a constructivist account. This shows how a particular perspective serves as a theoretical lens with which to look at questions which are normally overlooked or under-theorized by other theoretical perspectives. Second, the sociological institutionalist account adopted here allows for highlighting the constitutive effects of Europeanization on people's social identities. The EU not only increasingly regulates the daily lives of individuals in various respects; it also constitutes 'Europe' as a political and social space in people's beliefs and collective understandings. Third, studying questions of European identity highlights the importance of analysing the discursive construction of meanings mentioned above. European identity is not a given, nor does it fall from heaven: it is a specific construct in time and space whose content actually changes depending on the social and political context in which it is enacted. Fourth, the increasing contestation and politicization of European identity with competing visions of modern Europe versus fortress Europe reminds us that social identities are unlikely to remain fixed for a long period of time. Rather, they are frequently contested and subject to political controversies. The EU's identity is no exception.

### **The Enlargement Puzzle from a Social Constructivist Perspective**

One criticism of research on European identity concerns the 'so what?' question. The discussion above explored European identity as the 'dependent variable' (to use conventional social science language), but does it actually matter in terms of explaining observable outcomes in European integration? At the end of the day, political scientists want to account for political processes and outcomes and a constructivist focus on collective meaning constructions only makes sense if it helps us to understand these processes. Thus, I now use European identity as an explanatory factor to account for a crucial issue in European integration, namely eastern enlargement.

The Eastern enlargement of the European Union has not only represented a major challenge for the EU itself, but also a puzzle for conventional theories of European integration. As Schimmelfennig has convincingly demonstrated (Schimmelfennig 2003a, b), liberal intergovernmentalism offers a plausible first-cut explanation for the association agreements of the CEE countries with the EU. However, *EU membership* for the CEE countries is an entirely different story. The membership preferences of CEE countries were pretty clear: representation in EU policy-making processes was to be preferred over simple association agreements. Moreover, CEE countries expected some security benefits from EU membership (in addition to their NATO membership). Yet all of this does not explain why EU member states—including Germany—decided in favour of EU enlargement. As Schimmelfennig shows, a majority of EU member states should actually have been opposed to enlargement (including France and all southern European states; see Schimmelfennig 2003a, b; also Sedelmeier 2005; Sjursen 2006b). Yet, the 1993 Copenhagen

European Council agreed 'that the associated countries . . . shall become members of the European Union' and formulated conditions of admission. As Sedelmeier shows in detail (Sedelmeier 2005), members of the European Commission in particular served as norm entrepreneurs pushing and cajoling EU members into a commitment in favour of enlargement. How can this decision be explained?

Schimmelfennig uses a sociological institutionalist account to argue that the EU constitutes a liberal community of states committed to the rule of law, human rights, democracy, and to social market economy. His argument resonates with the concept of security communities based on a collective identity of its member (see e.g. Adler and Barnett 1998; for the original argument see Deutsch *et al.* 1957). Since the values of the community constitute its members, the members undertake a normative obligation toward 'states that share the collective identity of an international community and adhere to its constitutive values and norms' (Schimmelfennig 2001, 58–9). Therefore, these states are entitled to join the community.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, the collective identity of the EU as a liberal community explains the eastern enlargement puzzle to a large degree. Rhetorical commitment to community values entrapped EU member states into offering accession negotiations to the CEE and other eastern European countries despite the initial preferences against enlargement. Schimmelfennig's analysis represents a clever attempt to combine a constructivist account emphasizing constitutive norms and collective identities with a rationalist explanation focusing on narrowly defined egoistic interests. Fierke and Wiener push this analysis one step further by using speech act theory to show how Western states including EU members had committed themselves during the Cold War to welcome a free and democratic eastern Europe into the western Community. Their work on EU and NATO enlargement shows how normative commitments acquire their own dynamics as social rather than material capabilities (Fierke and Wiener 1999).

Yet two theoretical puzzles remain, one for rationalism, the other for constructivism. The rationalist puzzle concerns the problem how one can assume rational actors with pre-social (egoistic) preferences, on the one hand, who are—at the same time—embedded in the social structure of a community affecting their collective identities via constitutive norms, on the other hand. A rationalist ontology has a hard time accounting for constitutive norms presupposing a social structure in which actors are embedded. The constructivist puzzle concerns the fact that constitutive norms might affect actual behaviour of actors to only a limited degree. The EU's collective identity might explain the enlargement decision as such, but not the bickering of the member states during the actual negotiations with eastern European countries (for details see Sedelmeier 2005). A rationalist account such as liberal intergovernmentalism seems sufficient to account for the EU's behaviour in and the outcome of the actual enlargement negotiations, as Schimmelfennig argues (Schimmelfennig 2003a). When it comes to paying a price for one's collective identity in terms of offering beneficial conditions to new members, the EU looks more like an exclusive club dictating the terms of accession to new members. In sum, the EU's collective identity, which explains the 'if and when' of EU Eastern enlargement, appears to be largely decoupled from the EU's behaviour in the actual negotiations.

## Conclusion

This chapter has tried to make three points. First, I presented a short overview on social constructivism as a distinct research programme and tried to show what it contributes to the study of European integration. Second, I used the question of European identity to illustrate empirically social constructivism 'at work'. Third, I presented a constructivist account of the EU's Eastern enlargement in order to demonstrate that an identity-based explanation is better able to account for the enlargement decision itself than conventional theories of integration such as liberal intergovernmentalism.

My overall conclusion is that the arrival of a social constructivist research programme at the study of the EU was long overdue. It is all the more remarkable that this research has quickly left the stage of meta-theorizing and concern for ontology and epistemology behind and has now entered the realm of concrete empirical work dealing with real puzzles of European political life. Thus, social constructivist research on the EU has quickly entered the realm of 'normal social science'. It is, of course, ultimately up to the readers of constructivist work to decide whether their claims contribute to the accumulation of our knowledge about the EU. Most empirical work from a constructivist perspective engages alternative explanations and demonstrates its claims against competing hypotheses.

So, what remains to be done? My concluding remarks centre around the lack of a social constructivist theory of European integration on a par with, say, liberal intergovernmentalism, as Moravcsik has called for (Moravcsik 2001a). It is true that social constructivism has not generated a set of mid-range propositions that could compete with conventional integration theories such as neofunctionalism or liberal intergovernmentalism. Checkel's efforts to develop a constructivist theory of socialization processes in Europe probably come closest to such an attempt (see e.g. Checkel 2001b, 2003).

Should we strive for yet another stylized theory of integration offering a comprehensive account of European integration, this time from a constructivist perspective? And can we reasonably expect one to emerge from constructivism? As argued above, social constructivism does not represent a substantive theory of integration, but an ontological perspective or meta-theory. Constructivist insights might be used to generate theoretical propositions, e.g., on collective identity constructions, their causes and their effects on the integration process. Sociological institutionalism as the constructivist-inspired version of institutionalist research can be used to generate hypotheses about the impact of Europeanization on domestic change which can then be tested against or supplemented with more rationalist accounts of institutional effects (Börzel and Risse 2003, 2007). However, a full-fledged constructivist theory of regional integration is probably not on the cards.

Moreover, we do not need another theory of European integration resting on a single logic of social action and interaction. As the *Handbook of European Union Politics* demonstrates (Jorgensen *et al.* 2007), the theoretical fistfights in the study of European integration are over—they have never interested scholars of comparative politics or public policy as much as students of international relations anyway. If it is indeed true that there

is more than one social logic of action and social rationality, our theories need to take this insight into account. I have argued above that we need to distinguish the rational choice logic of consequentialism from the sociological institutionalist logic of appropriateness and that both are different from the logic of arguing. Yet real actors in the real world of the EU tend to combine various logics of action in their behaviour. They pursue egoistic interests—embedded in a society constituting their collective identities. They argue about the right thing to do—in order to pursue some goals and to solve collective action problems.

As a result, theories of European integration should strive to integrate the various logics of social action and resulting propositions about human behaviour in order to figure out in which ways they complement each other and where they offer competing accounts. Constructivist reasoning contributes to this endeavour by emphasizing processes of social action such as rule-following and meaning construction through reason-giving which rational choice accounts mostly bracket.

#### ■ NOTES

- 1 Whether 'multi-level governance' represents a full-fledged theory of integration or rather an analytical framework to study it, remains unclear (see contribution by Jachtenfuchs and Kohler-Koch in ch. 5 of the first edition of this volume; also Hooghe and Marks 2001).
- 2 The following discussion is partly based on Risse forthcoming. See also Checkel and Katzenstein 2008; Herrmann *et al.* 2004.
- 3 A similar argument could be made with regard to the 2004 EU decision to open accession negotiations with Turkey. At the time, the vision of modern and post-nationalist Europe clearly prevailed over those favoring a more exclusionary EU. Yet, the Turkish case also shows in contrast to Eastern enlargement that the negotiations themselves are clearly hampered by the lack of consensus on membership among the EU countries. This lack of consensus is strongly influenced by the contested nature of European identity when it comes to whether Turkey is 'in' or 'out'.

#### ■ GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Adler, E. (2002) 'Constructivism and International Relations', in *Handbook of International Relations*, edited by W. Carlsnaes *et al.* (London: Sage), 95–118. This article represents a good overview of the core arguments and debates of social constructivism.

Checkel, J. T. (ed.) (2005) 'International Institutions and Socialization in Europe'. Special Issue of *International Organization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). This edited volume uses sociological institutionalism to examine how exposure to European institutions has or has not had socializing effects on actors. It is a prime example of theoretically informed empirical work inspired by social constructivist insights.

— and Katzenstein, P. J. (eds) (2009) *European Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). This edited volume challenges the prevailing view of European identity as related to modernization and enlightenment. The authors argue that European identities are increasingly politicized and challenged, due to Eastern enlargement and the emergence of populist parties on the left and the right.

Christiansen, T. *et al.* (eds) (2001) *The Social Construction of Europe* (London: Sage). This edited volume demonstrates in an exemplary fashion what social constructivism has to contribute to the study of the European Union.

Risse, T. (2009) *We the European Peoples? Identity, Public Sphere, and European Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press). This book presents an overview of what we know about the Europeanization of collective identities and public spheres from a variety of disciplinary and methodological perspectives.

Sedelmeier, U. (2005) *Constructing the Path to Eastern Enlargement: The Uneven Policy Impact of EU Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press). This book provides another prominent example of 'applied social constructivism'. It discusses the EU's Eastern enlargement using theoretical insights from both rationalist and sociological institutionalism.

Wendt, A. (1999) *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). This book by one of the most prominent American international relations theorist introduces the core features and arguments of social constructivism.

### ■ STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is social constructivism, and what is its contribution to the study of European integration?
2. How does social constructivism's emphasis on constitutive analysis relate to the study of Europeanization?
3. What are the different ways in which communicative practices can be studied, and how does this relate to the analysis of European integration?
4. What is 'European identity', and how can we study it?
5. What can social constructivism contribute to the explanation of the EU's enlargement?

Social constructivism reached the study of the European Union (EU) in the late 1990s. The publication of a journal of European Public Policy special issue in 1999 marks a turning point in this regard (Christiansen et al. 1999; but see Jørgensen 1997). Social constructivism entered the field of EU studies mainly as a 'spillover' from the discipline of international relations, but also because of profound misgivings among scholars about the rather narrow focus and sterility of the debates between neofunctionalism and (liberal) intergovernmentalism. Research inspired by social constr...