EU Cultural Policy And The Creation of a Common European Identity

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Abstract

The paper examines the issues of cultural integration, moves towards a common EU cultural policy, and attempts to create a common European identity, with a major focus being on language and the use of English. Cultural integration has been seen as means of furthering integration beyond that which has been achieved in the spheres of economics and politics. In response to those the EU has been given powers with respect to cultural policy, and there have been hard-fought wars over trade and subsidies with respect to cultural products such as television programming, films and other cultural products. However, while some convergence has taken place between national cultures, there has been an increase in the use of English and the influence of Anglo-Saxon culture. It is argued here that the issue is an extremely difficult one for the EU, since moves to create a more common European culture will tend to increase the importance of English and of Anglo-Saxon culture, which is not the intention of their authors. However, if it were to meet with success, the creation of separate European culture distinct from that of the US and North America could be a divisive and undesirable development.

Introduction

The development and continued progress of integration in Europe has been one of the major success stories of the second half of the 20th century. Now that there has been substantial economic and political integration in western Europe, the issues of a common European cultural policy and the creation of a common European identity are gaining greater importance.

This paper examines the question of EU cultural policy, cultural divisions and attachments in the EU, and their relevance to the overall 'cultural politics' of the EU and the creation of a common European identity. It is argued here that there are two main underlying issues of this new 'cultural struggle'. The first is that the main member states of Germany and France, and the EU's common institutions, want to see the creation of a common European culture and identity in order to support and provide a basis for further integration. The second is that they wish at the same time to prevent or avoid the development or adoption of a common culture which is based on Anglo-Saxon popular culture, or, though this is less of a possibility, one based on the more liberal Scandinavian model. If it is assumed that the

process of creating a common European culture is already under way and will continue, the key question which remains is hence 'Whose culture is the new common European culture going to most closely approximate?'. Language, education, and the dominance of Anglo-Saxon popular culture, are all relevant issues here.

While there are differing constructs of the EU itself (Diez 1997), there are yet more disparate constructs and concepts of what a common European culture is and should mean, whether it is desirable, and how it may be achieved. It is argued here that the development of a common European culture is likely to prove much harder to guide and direct than the development of common political institutions and economic arrangements did.

A major conflict exists between the desires of member states and the greater part of their populations to hold on to national and in some cases regional identities, and the view that cultural differences are an impediment to integration and need to be reduced. One aspect of this is the development of 'identity-creating arguments' that there can be 'better' or 'worse' Europeans (Diez 1997, p. 29) and by implication good and bad citizens within the EU context.

Motivations for the creation of a common European culture and identity

The main motivation behind moves to promote or create a common European culture and identity appears to be the view that differences in culture and identity result in reduced support for further European integration, and hence there is a need to try and reduce or remove them. The view that the existence of such differences reduces support for further European integration is supported by cultural theorists such as Zetterholm (1994) and communitarian theorists such as Walzer (1970), who focus attention upon cultural difference as a source of objection and resistance to integrating pressures. Walzer's argument that (1970, p. 194) 'the citizen's point of reference is the political community, but as a man he has other memberships other references and these he sometimes sets against the state' can be readily extended to the EU and the context of the different attachments of citizens here, to the EU as well as to member states, regions, family, and other sources of identity such as ethnic and linguistic group, and class. The greater the degree of cultural heterogeneity among the groups forming a political unit, the greater the risk that political decisions may be inconsistent with the central values of one or more groups (Zetterholm 1994, p. 67). As long as the populations of member states feel that their national cultures are different enough from the standard unified culture being developed by the EU, they will be reluctant to transfer their allegiances to central institutions in Brussels.

It is not the case that individuals feel that their attachment to their national state and identity is in conflict with a more general European or EU identity. Hedetoft (1994, p. 19) notes that respondents who expressed a strong European identity could also express a strong sense of national identity. Nevertheless, there is a view that strong national attachments cause or assist individual states to take differing positions with respect to policy initiatives.

Political theories such as those propounded by Walzer and Zetterholm suggest that survey respondents will prefer smaller political units which are better able to reflect their preferences. This is borne out by survey results. For example the results of a 1990 survey indicated that the percentage of respondents describing themselves as 'very attached' to the EC ranged from 4 per cent in the Netherlands to 18 per cent in Italy and Spain (Reif 1993, p. 139). These percentages are very small in comparison with the high percentages of respondents from some of the smaller countries who described themselves as very attached to their country: 86 per cent in Greece, 84 per cent in Denmark, 71 per cent in Ireland and 70 per cent in Portugal. The percentages of respondents describing themselves as 'very attached' to their countries in the larger EC member states were lower than this, being 58 per cent for the UK, 55 per cent for Italy, 47 per cent for Germany and 46 per cent for France. However, although the Netherlands and Belgium are smaller than any of the 'big four' countries just mentioned, only 40 per cent of respondents in the Netherlands and 30 per cent of those in Belgium described themselves as 'very attached' to their country. The levels of attachment which individuals had to their region varied widely. More respondents were attached to their country rather than their region in Belgium, Germany, Greece and Spain, while the converse tended to be true elsewhere.

Duchesne and Frognier (1995) note that 6-26 per cent of respondents selected Europe as their first or second choice of identity in Eurobarometer surveys, with the percentage being highest in Italy where 20-25 per cent chose Europe as the unit to which they belonded as first or second choice, and lowest in Denmark where it reached 6 per cent in 1979, but with less than 1 per cent giving it as a first choice. A 1996 peak in the proportion of respondents indicating a sense of European identity was followed by an adrupt decline in 1988, perhaps affected by the 1986 enlargement. With respect to the question of whether European identity grows independently of national pride, they found that 'national pride' was not a determinant of attitudes towards the EC, which is in accordance with Hedetoft's results. A larger proportion of highly educated respondents stated that they often consider themselves European, with there being high correlations in this respect in Greece, of 0.30, and in Portugal, of 0.32, with only 10 per cent of less educated respondents in Portugal saying 'often' compared with 36 per cent of those still studying at age 20. In Denmark educational level produced variations of only 6-10 per cent, but there were variations of 20-40 per cent in Spain, Greece and Britain. There was some indication of a reverse correlation in Germany in 1983, with the proportion often feeling European being higher among the lowest income quartile than among the highest income quartile. With regard to income effect, this accounted for 20 per cent or more of variation on this issue in Spain, and in Portugal for more of the variation on this issue than education did. Fewer women felt European. In Greece, Spain and Portugal younger respondents were more likely to report often feeling European, but in other member states the feeling was stronger among older residents. They concluded that feelings of European identity were strongly related to social and demographic factors in Greece, Portugal and Spain and to a lesser extent Ireland and Italy, but that in Denmark, Britain, Germany and France respondents' feelings seem quite independent of these factors.

National attachments are not necessarily something individuals see as positive. Hedetoft found that (p. 23) a 'fair number' of German and British respondents' to his survey 'frequently denied having a national identity, or admitted to having one but only as if this was a confession of fault'. The citizens of smaller member states are presumably less likely to be motivated by negative associations of nationalism. Bekemans and Lombaert (1996, p. 99) see identification with the state as weakening.

The development of EU cultural policy

The impact of cultural policies in reducing national attachments and furthering a sense of EU or European identity necessarily takes time. Core cultural differences are developed during childhood, and change only very slowly (Soeters 1996).

The development of EU involvement in cultural policy has also been a slow process. In 1977 the Commission released a communication to the Council which proposed that the European Community (EC) should be involved in the economic and social aspects of culture (Bekemans and Lombaert 1996, p. 194). During 1982-86 there was a greater involvement of the EU's institutions in cultural issues, with the Addonino Committee on 'A People's Europe' being established by the Council in 1984 to look at a number of measures towards strengthening and promoting the EC's identity and image among its citizens and the rest of the world. It supported the adoption of initiatives which included an EC passport, an EC driving licence, an EC emergency health card, EC border signs and an EC flag, and the financing of an EC TV channel to promote 'the European message'.

The Maastricht Treaty on European Union, which was signed in 1992, but only ratified and in force in 1993, gave the EU's institutions competence in the area of culture and cultural policy. Article 128 under Title IX sets this out as follows (Senelle, p. 55):

> 1. The Community shall contribute to the flowering of cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore.
>
> 2. Action by the Community shall be aimed at encouraging cooperation between Member States, and, if necessary, supporting and supplementing their action in the following areas:
>
> - improvement of the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples;
> - conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage of European significance;
> - non-commercial cultural exchanges;
> - artistic and literary creation, including in the audiovisual sector,
>
> 3. The Community and the Member States shall foster cooperation with third countries and the competent international organisations in the sphere of culture, in particular the Council of Europe.
>
> 4. The Community shall take cultural aspects into account in its action under other provisions of this Treaty.

The motivations behind the attempts to create a common EU or European culture include the desire to create a new 'imagined community' along the lines postulated by

Benedict Anderson (Anderson 1991), with the concept being particularly apt for an EU whose borders have been shifting at intervals to take in new territories and national identities and will continue to do so. The creation of such an 'imagined community' would give the EU's common institutions, and the political reality of a high degree of control by the EU's key member states of Germany and France, a legitimacy they continue to lack, which in turn results in inadequate popular support for further political integration and transfers of power to the prospective new superstate which would be achieved at the end point of the integration process. However, there are other motivations, including the desires of particular member states to bolster their interests within the EU and the impact of their domestic policies, and the desire to protect EU industry from outside competition.

While the EU's political institutions are active in trying to create and promote a common European culture and identity, critics such as Galtung (1994) argue that such symbols and programmes are unnecessary. In Galtung's view (p. 220) 'Euronationalism is age-old', and 'What we are dealing with is European supernationalism in search of institutions, rather than supra-European institutions in search of nationalism'. One of his points of criticism is that the efforts of the EU's institutions result in a (p. 224) 'new distortion', involving works which deal with the EC/EU in 'a totally uncritical manner'. He cites as an example of a work involving this distortion a textbook by Jean-Baptiste Duroselle called *L'Europe: Historie des Peuples*[1], describing it as presenting a gender biased and sanitised view of history.

More recently there has been a four-year saga of attempts to impose TV programming quotas on an EU-wide basis which appeared to come to a close with a decision by the Council to retain the existing system of voluntary quotas. Although the European Parliament (EP) attempted to introduce 63 proposed amendments to the directive, mot of these were rejected. Some of them, such as attempts to extend the quotas to video-on-demand or cable TV, and to the Internet, were beyond the bounds of technical feasibility.

David Puttnam (Puttnam 1997) portrays the conflict between the US and the then EC over cultural products such as television programming in the context of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations as a 'war' between the US and Europe, with even the CIA's agents being brought in to obtain information. The US was seeking to have programming and film brought into the negotiations as traded products for which there should be liberalisation, the EU was seeking to exclude them from this.

At the supranational level, the European Court of Justice has adopted an 'active and at times imaginative' role in extending the provisions of the Treaty and the application of Community law over the ears of culture and education, at the same time restricting and reducing the powers of the member states (Pauly and Higgins 1996, p. 227). Its expansionary and pro-integrationist stance may be expected to continue.

Wayne David (David 1996) considers attempts such as these futile, on the basis that there is no likelihood of an EU identity superseding or replacing existing identities. However, this is probably rather too simplistic a conclusion. There is evidence that a more common

identity is developing, but that it is strongly influenced by Anglo-Saxon culture, as discussed below.

The question of 'Whose culture?'

Cultural integration can be both problematic and non-problematic in nature. As integration develops, communication is made easier by the convergence of economies, ideologies and lifestyles (Mussolf, Schaeffner and Townson 1997, p. 11). This convergence can be a result of modernisation and the removal of barriers. It can also be result of pressures from one or more cultures for adaptation to their model, and concerns about such pressures can be major source of conflict. When one group feels that the other is using the political system to disseminate its culture throughout the whole society, the group that feels this will see the actions of the other group as threatening its culture (Zetterholm, p. 70). One very basic example of this is the British reluctance on entry to the then EC to abandon chocolate cakes which were produced with the assistance of brown dye, and canned peas which included green dye to make them appear more palatable: the dyes involved were on the EC's banned list because they were considered to be a health risk. Another is the reluctance of the Netherlands on the one hand to make illegal the sale of marijuana, and on the other of France and Germany to remove their legal penalties for its sale or possession, a situation which has prevented the French government from being able to remove its entry checks on the Belgian border.[2] Differences in attitudes to pornography have also caused conflicts, with complaints in the UK against the broadcasting of hard core pornography by a Dutch satellite TV company. In this latter case the UK government took legal measures against the company which were not challenged as being contrary to EU law. The Dutch government changed its own laws to make child pornography more clearly illegal, removing some of the concerns of other EU countries that their own restrictions were being undermined by over-liberal Dutch laws. All of these are examples of aspects of cultural difference which were resolved in various ways, sometimes through the removal of the difference, sometimes by finding that EU law allows the difference to be maintained, and sometimes by not applying agreements. The simple non-application of EU laws, for example in the informal economies of Italy and Greece, allows culture-based differences to be maintained in spite of the adoption of common provisions.

However, a major problem with respect to cultural harmonisation is that this has in practice involved the increasing influence of US popular culture, and widening of the use of English. The nature of the problem is indicated by the following quotation from the president of the EP's culture committee, Luciana Castellina, on the EP's majority vote in favour of making quotas requiring over 50 per cent European content in television programming mandatory (Buonadonna 1996):

> I am pleased by what we have achieved. This is not a victory over the US but a victory for our own culture. Something must be done in a situation when 82 per cent of programmes aired in Europe are produced in the US.

However, the EP's vote was overruled by the Council, with British opposition being a strong factor. Britain could be regarded as the 'Trojan Horse' in the battle to create a common culture not subsumed by Anglo-Saxon influences. While there are many differences between British and US culture, there are many similarities, with language being perhaps the most important connection. One consequence is that there is a common literature between the UK and the US, but not a 'common European literature', as the economist J. K. Galbraith points out (Cornwall 1998).

Language and cultural politics

Language is a very important issue for EU cultural politics, but once again, it is not as straightforward an issue as might first appear. One view is that the continued existence of numerous national languages as official languages used at the supranational or common level is a major barrier to cultural integration. For example, Edye (1997, p. 73) states that in lacking a common language, the EU lacks one of the main components of culture (Edye 1997, p. 73).). Kramer and Kyriakopoulos (1996) noted that the EU has eleven official languages and considered whether this indicated that there was a need for cultural integration to consolidate political and economic integration. Haller (1994) recognises that the diversity of languages in Europe and the EU constitutes a barrier to the development of a common European culture. However, he also recognises that in practice English has been developing as a *de facto lingua franca* in Europe. Hence the problem is not that Europe does not have a de facto common language, but that for political and other reasons there is strong resistance to the acceptance of this situation on a formal basis.

Although English is the most common second language of the EU, there has been strong resistance, mainly from France but increasingly now from Germany, to the elevation of English to the status of the official common language of the EU. One reason for this has been fear of Anglo-Saxon cultural hegemony, as discussed below. Another has been the late entry of the UK into the integration process. Had Britain been a founding member of the EU, English might have been accepted as the common language. National prestige is also an important factor, certainly for large member states which are conscious of their global 'image', and on more concrete grounds. When the European Economic Community (EEC), the predecessor of the European Community or EC and the later EU, was established in 1958 with a membership of six, a decision was made that all the main languages of the member states would be represented and used in the political interactions and work of the common institutions. The Luxembourg vernacular, Letzeburgisch, was not a written formal language and was hence excluded. When the EC was enlarged in 1973 to include the UK, Ireland and Denmark, English became important as a working language in the common institutions, and the effective working languages of the European Commission have been French and English. One consequence of the decision to use all the main languages of the member states as working languages has been that while there are more speakers of Turkish than Danish in the EU, Danish is an official EU language while Turkish is not (Barbour 1996).

The decision not to move to a common language has imposed a heavy financial burden on the EU, with two billion US dollars going on language services in 1989. It cost over half a million US dollars per MEP to meet the cost of translation requirements each year (Gubbins 1996). Gubbins' solution to these problems is the adoption of Esperanto as the EU's common language. However, it might be argued that there is already a language which most MEPs and officials have some facility in, and that is English.

The importance of the English language can be seen from Salman Rushdie's description of it as 'the most powerful medium of communication in the world' (Wells 1998), and from its having been proposed as a 'global language ' by Crystal (1997), as well as its status as the *de facto* common language of Europe. As Hanson (1997) indicates in his review of Crystal, it is not the flexibility, clarity, or ease of learning of a language which makes it popular, but its importance and value: people learn and use English to improve their prospects, to become more internationalised, to participate in the excitement of youth culture, and to feel part of the 'in crowd' and to be in touch.

Opposition to greater use of English or its being given a more formal status in Europe can be understood in terms of Crystal's warning of the resentment, envy, anger of the non-English mother-tongue speakers who feel disadvantaged, or feel their mother tongue or identity threatened. These feelings no doubt account for moves to try to restrict the growing use of English as the common European language. The culture committee of the EP has for example proposed that there be widespread return to the teaching of Latin and Greek so that these languages can be maintained as 'a basis for European culture in a world threatened by technology and pragmatism' (Fraser 1997). The problem with maintaining and furthering a separate European culture through such a move is that it would induce a separateness of Europe relative to North America and the rest of the western world which does not at present exist. For example, the Internet is mainly conducted in English.

The unification of Germany, and also the admission of Austria to the EU, have raised the importance of German in the EU. There has been a trend towards much greater use of German by politicians, and in the new united Germany and in Austria there has been a greater emphasis on German language radio stations and television programming. Central and eastern Europe are now the new cultural or linguistic battle grounds between English and German. German is spoken to a greater extent than English as a second language in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Kazakhstan and Georgia, but is very much second to English as the second language of most other central and east European countries. Russian is still important, even in countries which aspire to membership of the EU and of NATO; for example in the Baltic States national armed forces use it as their common language. Germany is taking steps to try and increase the use and importance of German in central and eastern Europe, as well as the EU. It is running language classes for top central and east European government officials, and sent 522 language teachers to eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in 1995. The Foreign Minister, Klaus Kinkel, has said he wants to see the language play a greater role in Brussels (New Europe 1996). Since France is also taking steps to preserve and perhaps expand the use of French, spending US$1.1 billion a year to promote its

use internationally (The Economist 1996), there is no prospect at present of the adoption of English as the 'official' European language. Laws continue to be applied to prevent the entry of English words into popular use in the French language.

The question of Anglo-Saxon and British cultural influence

One of the paradoxes of European integration is that the stronger and more integrated Europe becomes, the more the influence of Anglo-Saxon culture has increased, leading to the attempts to hold it back through cultural 'dykes' such as television programming quotas, refusal to allow it become the official EU language, and subsidies for national film production.

While the EU's institutions battle the inroads of Anglo-Saxon popular culture through attempts to impose television programming quotas, its young people choose to use the assistance provided by the EU's Lingua and Erasmus schemes to study in the UK rather than France, Germany, or other EU countries. For both schemes, around a third of students (33 per cent for Lingua and 32 per cent for Erasmus) chose to go the UK, followed by 22 and 27 per cent respectively who chose to go to France, and 10 and 18 per cent respectively who chose to go to Germany (Gubbins 1996, p. 125). In 1995-96 more than 21 800 European students came to Britain through support from Erasmus mobility grants, while just over 11 700 British students took up a temporary place at a European institution. The latter group is estimated to have decreased by around 900 the following year (Tysome 1997). The ERASMUS scheme has been partly aimed at developing a shared sense of identity among students from different member states (Kleinman and Piachaud 1993). One response to the imbalance in favour of study in the UK, which has also been expensive for the UK because it has to meet the cost of places, and to criticisms that the schemes were elitist, was to cut back and replace the schemes with assistance for schools and language teachers only, but this move now seems to have been reversed.

The reason for the greater popularity of the UK as a location for education for young people in the EU arises largely because of the status of English and its value on the job market. However, other factors are also important. Education in the UK could be said to have a more 'international' nature, at least compared to smaller member states, because of the long tradition of educating overseas students, and also because the systems of student assessment and of definition of appropriate research sources are similar to those of North America. British youth culture, and even the 'individualist' as opposed to collectivist nature of the UK as indicated by Soeters (1996), could be considered to be factors here.

Conclusions

There is widely held view that cultural convergence will assist in the furthering of integration in the EU and Europe. It has encouraged the development of cultural policy powers and initiatives on the part of the EU, most notably including the competence with respect to cultural and educational policies given by the Maastricht Treaty on European

Union. There is some evidence of cultural convergence in terms of modifications to the ways in which national systems differ, but it is also still the case that considerable differences continue to exist. However, what there is most clearly evidence of is that moves towards cultural integration will bring a greater acceptance of Anglo-Saxon culture and the use of English, something which is not an intended outcome and remains a matter of greater controversy.

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Endnotes

[1] *A History of Europe's Peoples*

[2] France does not have a direct border with the Netherlands. As Belgium and the Netherlands did not have controls on their mutual border, being part of the Benelux union, French control of imports and entry from the Netherlands have to be undertaken at the Belgian border.