



# A COHERENT FOREIGN POLICY AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR INTERNAL STABILITY

The European Union is currently facing a political crisis that is threatening its internal stability. This is exemplified by increasing levels of Euroscepticism across its Member States. This crisis is *inter alia* a result of the lack of identification of European citizens with EU institutions, and thus an issue pertaining to the construction of the EU's identity at large. It will be argued here that there is an inherent connection between foreign policy and the inclusiveness of political identity. Accordingly, a unified foreign policy based on the foundational principles of the Union represents an approach to solve its 'identity-problem'. As a consequence, such foreign policy serves as a positive factor for the internal stability of the Union.

## IDENTITY FORMATION

In the realm of Psychology, a prime foundation of identity lies in what Lacan calls the *Stade du Miroir* – the subjectification of the individual through the realization of *relative otherness* to the world at large. The underlying process is a cognitive operation of dialectical nature: the subject acknowledges itself as such by learning to separate itself from all things other. In the psychology of development, this operation is a necessity prior to the creation of an individual identity; once the infant grasps his conceptual *otherness*, this *otherness* can be reinforced in a continuous process of identity formation. The individualisation of the self is furthermore a necessary condition to render *voluntary action* possible, as it facilitates the distinction of *subject* from *object*, i.e. the *manipulator* from the (*to be*) *manipulated*.

This base-psychological concept is elevated to the collective level in the social sciences. In sociology, which regards identity as a multi-layered construction, the baseline operation of identity-construction is always one that is dialectical: the individual (*voluntarily* or

*involuntarily*) constructs itself by continuously deciding on *association* or *non-association* with a given group. The existence of any given form of collective identity thus has as condition a renouncing of association with other identities. Political science then applies this logic to collective action: for a collective action to take place, the members of a group must identify themselves sufficiently with each other.

The above gains in complexity with regards to governance, especially democratic governance. In democratic states, individuals accept to be both *subject and object* of collective action. This is due to various mechanisms of identification that the state employs, such as citizenship, nationality and votes. The stronger the level of identification with the state, the more stable the community, and the more willing the individual is to accept to be object of collective action.

The true force of the democratic state is thus its collective identity. This implies not only the differentiation of its citizens from all non-citizens, but the unity of citizens behind the state in its actions, which finally pertain to the citizens themselves in the form of laws and policies.

## EUROPEAN IDENTIFICATION PROBLEM

The current crisis that the European Union currently faces is, among other factors, due to a lack of its citizens' identification with it. Despite this, the EU's impact on those citizens has increased in magnitude, by virtue of vertical integration. This results in a divergence between the EU's institutional trajectory and the citizens'

# FOREIGN POLICY AND STABILITY

In other words, European policies are less and less perceived as *collective action* in the eyes of the European citizens. They are experienced as foreign, top down interventions into an otherwise democratically justified national legal structure. In short, European citizens are alienated from the highest order of legislation that befits them: EU law.

Euroscepticism has long relied on an argumentation that denounces the oppression of the individual and the sovereign state, accusing a somewhat ‘foreign’ technocratic elite in Brussels. European policies and laws are decried as not sufficiently democratic, and are consequently rejected as illegitimate. This causes a disconnect between the European collective, as object of EU policy, and the assumed representation of this collective - the EU administration. Therefore, the identity of the European Union is perceived as being opposed to the various identities of national citizens.

## THE EU’S COMPLEX IDENTITY

The first measure to be taken on a quest to increasing the stability of Europe is to engage in a comprehensive campaign of fostering identification with the EU. However, the very principles of the Union do not allow for an imagination of the EU as a national community, or any form of ethno-cultural belonging - thus, a different basis for identity construction is needed. As outlined in ‘Europe as an Idea’, “the only viable paradigm for a European future”, and its only possible source of identity, is a set of **universal principles pertaining to the rights of the individual** - or in other words, a normative conviction about justice. As such, the identity of the EU is much more complex than that of the Nation State: it is not *passive*, as national, cultural or ethno-linguistic belonging is; it is an *active* identity, which is constantly re-affirmed by the application of foundational principles. The actuation of its principles must, however, be perceived as *collective action* of the *aggregation of individual subjects* the Union claims to represent. So far, the chronologically previous collectives present in EU territory, i.e. its member states, have been the sole object of this action. The result of this exclusivity is a perceived conflict between EU governance and national sovereignty. Hence, this dynamic needs to be reversed by introducing a different *object* to EU policy, by engaging foreign policy in a unified way.

Foreign policy is a powerful tool for nation building. The identification of the *other* that the nation as *subject* engages unifies the individuals behind the collective; the ugliest example of this being war. Most national identities figure one or more of these glorious ‘foreign policy moments’. The EU could profit from this dynamic by rallying its citizens in a similar way. However, as there is no imaginable *national identity* yet, but rather an *identity of principles*, foreign policy gains its identity-constructing-power not by its mere existence, but by its accordance with the principles at the basis of the European community.

The foundational moment of the European Union was, paradoxically, a collection of ‘foreign policy moments’ - peace for the continent. However, the institution has never left this stage: European affairs are still treated under the umbrella of national foreign policies. Today, this dynamic needs to be overcome in order to protect the primary goal of the Union. Said *overcoming* can only be achieved by taking the next step of the political project by taking a unified stance on *true* foreign policy - i.e. extra-EU matters.

If the EU foundational principles were to be applied in its foreign policy, this unified foreign policy would effectively contribute to the stabilization of the identification processes, and thus challenge the disconnect between EU’s administration and its citizens.

**F**or the Union to persist, its citizens must be able to identify thoroughly with it. The absence of a unified foreign policy counteracts this identification. However, for a foreign policy to have a positive effect on identification dynamics (and thus stability), it must be in line with the principles on which EU’s identity is constructed. In other words, a coherent foreign policy is a fundamental variable for the Union’s internal stability. Therefore, Sine Qua Non has decided to advocate for a coherent and unified performance of the EU in the international sphere.