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The political contestation of Europe: from integration to disintegration?

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The current crisis of the project of European integration places pressure on and raises expectations concerning the interdisciplinary European Studies community. Looking back at the history of political ideas that informed the project of European integration, the article critically discusses how a new (or renewed) narrative for Europe can be constructed from below and not imposed from above. It seeks new integration dynamics in the ways in which popular discontent finds expression in contemporary Europe, in which citizens experience European integration as crisis and trauma, and in which citizens themselves envision the major challenges ahead. In collecting the voice of popular discontent, we find that citizens' dissatisfaction and frustration with European integration are related to deficits in the democratic process and efficiency of governance, increased inequalities at a global scale and challenges to truth and rationality. Visions of 'alternative Europe' do in this sense embrace the old Enlightenment promise and do not fundamentally reject it.

Keywords: interdisciplinarity, European Studies, European integration, political contestation

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Introduction: locating Europe

I wish to begin my exploration of the landscape of European studies by considering those students who have chosen to frequent our European Studies classes. Not all of these students will pursue PhDs and become researchers in an interdisciplinary study centre, but we are proud to send them out to a wide range of professions, and we hope not only that they will apply their specialisation in European studies in their future employment but also that they will embrace Europe as a way of life. European Studies is a vocation, not just a profession. The question of who these students in our European Studies programmes are and where they are heading is in this sense related to the question of what Europe is and where Europe is going.

What does this young generation of students in our European Studies classes tell us about the current state of the European Union? Sociologically speaking, we have some ideas about who they are: Many of them perhaps consider an education in European Studies as an entry ticket to one of the prestigious European institutions or as a first step on the path toward a European and international career. They are motivated to take creative jobs that require transnational skills, mobility, and frequent travel. At the same time, we teach our students about the value of and opportunities for conducting a mobile transnational life. We also wish our European Studies programmes to possess a student population that reflects Europe's own diversity, and we invite students from across Europe and the rest of the world to apply to join us. At many universities, thriving Euro-

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pean Studies centres are the flagship of internationalisation and intercultural exchange across disciplines and peoples.

Taking a closer look at the composition of our European Studies classes, we might soon realise that they are not so mixed after all and that, despite their multinational origins, we attract a rather uniform group of students. The lifestyles of the Erasmus generation who choose to spend their student years in cities like Barcelona, Berlin, Amsterdam, and Copenhagen has been trivialised, entered popular culture, and portrayed in movies such as *L'Auberge Espagnole*. Their socialisation, their mindsets and values, their tastes do not differ dramatically. The trained sociologists among us can easily categorise them in terms of class, value attachment, political attitudes, and habitus. We know that they belong or very soon will belong to the highest-educated strata of our societies. We even have quite detailed knowledge about their political preferences: We may not know precisely which parties they vote for, but we can predict that they support liberal values, that many of them have a preference for open markets but also feel strongly about equality and justice.

A not so innocent bureaucracy

The social and political class to which the students who graduate from our European Studies programmes will belong has been identified as an emerging European power elite (Kauppi, 2014). They are the Eurostars, as Adrian Favell has called the frequent travellers between the European capitals and Brussels: a new generation accustomed to crossing borders and making the best of freedom of movement as a new lifestyle (Favell, 2008). Their highest ambition is to work at one of the EU institutions in Brussels, but they are not old-style bureaucrats, even if they are frequently perceived as such. They are bureaucrats with a mission and a vision. The Brussels elite has been studied extensively by political scientists,[1] and their popularity as an object of study is probably not unrelated to the fact that many EU scholars closely identify with them or have ambitions to join their ranks. The European power elite is sometimes referred to as the 'Brussels bubble', and it cannot go unnoticed that we, as European Studies scholars, have developed a clear preference for moving within the same bubble and making very similar living arrangements. The German author Robert Menasse recently delivered an account of the Brussels bubble in the form of a best-selling novel. *Die Hauptstadt* is written in the form of a crime novel with a political message. Brussels is the meeting place for a colourful group of protagonists: a Holocaust survivor in an old-age home, an Austrian pig farmer, a Catholic killer from Poland, a Belgian police officer, and numerous EU bureaucrats. All these Brussels protagonists, and especially the bureaucrats among them, are ridiculed as the plot develops. Yet, in all their absurdity, they are like miracle healers who cure us of a dangerous disease, which is called nationalism. The *Hauptstadt* is in this sense not just a utopia, no-place. It is synonymous with a common good beyond the nationalism of EU member states and beyond the particularity of the interests of the many lobbyists who populate the capital.

Turning one's back to the EU

Not everybody likes the *Hauptstadt* population and even less so its visions of more Europe and less nation-state. There is another population out there, one that develops resentments and increasingly positions itself in opposition to Europe. We have long ignored the multifaceted resistance to the European integration project and regarded it as a parallel world, unrelated to our own. For the convinced European, the atavistic nationalism of these populations is akin to a wrong-headedness that needs to be cured, and if the

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[1] See, for instance, (Trondal, 2010).

cure fails to take effect, then mechanisms of punishment apply in the form of inattention and marginalisation. Polarisation results from the unwillingness of each side to consider the legitimacy of the other's concerns.

Many claim that polarisation in contemporary Europe does not follow old ideological cleavages but instead occurs along a new cultural divide between communitarians and cosmopolitans (De Wilde and Zürn, 2013; Kriesi et al., 2012), between nativists and globalists (Beck, 2006), between people who develop capacities to live anywhere and people who are bound to place (Bauman, 1998). In recent elections, voters' political identities have increasingly been shaped by a struggle over the borders of our community. Measuring attitudes towards borders has become a safe predictor of voting behaviour. The Europe's two populations not only support different values but develop different lifestyles. In fact, they live different lives and increasingly seek confrontation. Brexit is a case of a divided population, with mutual disrespect and mistrust being the order of the day. This is no longer an invisible divide but one that mobilises people in the street and translates into divisions of friends and families, struggles, and even violence.

One consequence of this development is that European Studies has become more normative and value driven. In the old ideological struggle between left and right, the European Studies community could claim neutrality. In contrast, neither EU scholars nor EU institutions can claim neutrality in the struggle between communitarians and cosmopolitans and between globalists and nativists; they are deeply involved in this struggle. European Studies no longer concerns European integration but instead the social cohesion and integration of our national societies, of the communities in which we live, and the functioning of our democracies.

The interdisciplinarity of European Studies

The EU's pedagogical mission to facilitate a new kind of European socialisation is institutionalised in its numerous student exchange and teaching programmes. No European Studies programme has ever claimed to restrain itself to the education of bureaucrats; such programmes wish of course to also educate the good European citizen (which may not differ strongly from the traditional understanding of our national schools and universities as seeking to educate the 'good citizen'). Teaching and learning the skills for engaging in a particular profession is one thing, but how does one teach and learn to become a 'good European'? If a distinct 'habitus' of a European scholarly community exists, it can be probably nailed down in the call for interdisciplinarity. The European scholar strives to develop critical and reflexive attitudes that are applied across disciplines to distinguish themselves from the work of those scholars who specialise simply in national politics, national history, or national law. Following Luhmann (1997), we can say that European scholars are second-order observers who critically and reflexively scrutinise national scholars' perspectives on their national societies. Such a critical 'European second-order' view includes a reflection upon our own role as scholars of Europe, a distant perspective on the academic world, which divides disciplines and national scientific communities and practices. The bird's eye view of Europe and the bird's eye view of the European Studies community are, however, rarely combined. The European Studies community still needs to develop a programme for critically understanding its own practices, its habitus as a set of scholars and practitioners of Europe. In short, we require a kind of Bourdieuian critical sociology of practice to scrutinise ourselves trend to understand our own deep involvement in European integration (Bourdieu, 1988).

When we speak of interdisciplinarity in European Studies, we in fact most often wish to demarcate the singularity of our discipline. There is an implicit claim of originality or even of superiority involved in the notion that our interdisciplinary European Studies pro-

grammes allow us to see things that are hidden to individual disciplines, to reach higher levels of reflection, or to apply a critical perspective that is 'deeper', 'superior', or more 'valid' than those of single disciplinary analyses. It is perhaps possible for a single discipline to understand a nation-state, to write national history, to practice political science in the old tradition as *Staatswissenschaft*, to study markets as *Volkswirtschaft*, yet Europe is governance without state and government; it is not one history but many histories, and it is a market without a *Volk*. The diversity of Europe calls for a new singular discipline, but unless such a discipline is established on interdisciplinary foundations, it risks losing sight of the diversity that it is designed to study.

Still, we might ask critically, why do we need interdisciplinarity, if what is needed most urgently to understand this complex body of Europe is specialisation? And how can these specialised competences be combined with interdisciplinarity? Can we be so sure that we improve the employability of our candidates, if during a two years master education we can barely introduce them into the complexity of European politics, history, law and society? Or is interdisciplinarity maybe a question of philanthropy and does not need to be justified by pragmatic reasoning?

The renowned journal 'Nature' has recently called for interdisciplinarity as the moral duty of scientists, if they want to save the world.[2] Such a noble reasoning is not unknown to the European community of scholars, who have decided to join their forces for the rescue of Europe. But what exactly do we wish to rescue, if we engage in interdisciplinary European Studies? What forces do we join and what can we gain from it?

Discussing interdisciplinarity involves first accepting that divisions between disciplines exist and that the crossing of these divides can explain our object of study, which is Europe. On the one hand, such divisions are imposed upon us by the departmental segmentation of our faculties, by our university administrations, and by our professional associations. On the other hand, we often ourselves engage in differentiating practices, which are simultaneously demarcating practices of our professional identities and which help us justify what we can do better and with greater professionalism than our colleagues next door. It is difficult, however, to identify precisely which disciplines combine to encompass the field of European Studies. The most common model seeks to connect law, political science, and history, but there are many other subdisciplines that likewise claim to cover specific European skills (for example, European ethnology, European linguistics, European area studies, and European sociology), and these have up to now only rarely been taken into account in the study of European integration.

Broadly speaking, we can distinguish between two methods of bringing together the various disciplines that constitute the field of European Studies: the layer cake model of cross-disciplinarity and the marble cake model of interdisciplinarity. In the layer cake model, European scholars build upon specialisation and seek to aggregate knowledge from different disciplines. Research is done at the departmental level within one field of specialisation, but the European scholars within the department engage in frequent exchanges across the disciplines to taste different flavours and to gain inspiration from the cross-readings of other disciplines. The marble cake model of interdisciplinarity is more challenging in its attempt to establish an interdiscipline called 'European Studies', which requires scholars to mix their ingredients in such a manner as to arrive at new flavours and tastes. Research findings are not simply aggregated but claim originality and innovation through the application of new concepts, theories, and methods. Ulrich Beck (2003) has famously advocated such a move beyond 'methodological nationalism' in the social sciences, but it remains unclear which particular methods and theories should ground such a critical sociology of Europe.

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[2] https://www.nature.com/news/why-interdisciplinary-research-matters-1.18370

An example of European research across disciplines is provided by the existence of study and research programmes that are built upon various pillars, all of which possess explanatory power of their own when it comes to supporting the building of Europe. Scholars can then opt between a specialisation in political science, law, or history or can choose to combine their area and country specialisation to widen their perspective on Europe. Through such cross-disciplinary lenses, one can develop a nuanced perspective of European diversity. The European scholar works like a cartographer who fills in the coordinates on a map. A European Studies interdisciplinary research programme of this kind could involve attempts to trace processes or enhance understanding of structural transformations of the wider European space. Stein Rokkan's (1999) research programme of a political sociology of Europe represented just such an effort to seek correlations between parallel processes of "'integration and disintegration', of 'identity and cultural change', of 'people and power', of 'state and society' – none of which would be rooted in any particular discipline" (Tonra, 2003: 4). Through such an interdisciplinary lens, the researcher focuses less on individual coordinates on the map of the European landscape and more on tracing the roads that connect these diverse points and that determine their commonalities and unity.

The layer cake model of cross-disciplinary European Studies relies not on strong theoretical foundations but instead on the comparative skills of the researchers who exchange their specialised knowledge. In contrast, the marble cake model requires researchers to engage in a theorising exercise. The task is not just to add different layers but to develop an original recipe, to write it down, and to exchange it. Sociology delivers the template for social theories that explain how European integration is possible in a way that links markets, laws, and society. Without going into detail regarding the theoretical underpinnings and research programmes of such a sociology of European integration,[3] I will now seek to delineate a narrative or discursive approach to the study of European integration. The key assumption here is that European integration has become a normative and political battlefield and that the contestations it encompasses demarcate and structure a particular social space that can be termed a 'European society' (Trenz, 2016).

Turning collective experiences into narration

A narrative approach to European integration is not simply meant as a historical analysis of the origins of Europe but instead takes its point of departure from the ongoing contestations regarding the shape of Europe, its underlying purposes, and its trajectory. One underlying assumption is that such discursive battles rely upon established semantics and shared ideational foundations. Another assumption is that the discursive contestation of Europe is not restricted to a debate among intellectuals but has entered everyday practices and involves all of us as individuals and as collectives. Europe in general and the EU more specifically are defined as collective challenges in relation to which we must position ourselves. To belong to Europe is not the banal reality of belonging to our nation-states, within which we have been socialised and to which we are acculturated. The encounter with Europe requires an active interpretation of what Europe stands for and how (or why) we consider it relevant. If there is an emerging pro- and anti-European cleavage within our society, this cleavage concerns not only political struggles and benefits of EU membership but also about these broader cultural orientations and lifestyle differences that distinguish or unite us as Europeans.

Europe as our shared home: integration

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[3] See, however, my previous work in Trenz (2011). For the contours of a Sociology of European Integration, see also Bach, 2008; Eigmüller and Mau, 2010; Favell and Guiraudon, 2011.

The vocabulary developed by social scientists to describe social integration is intrinsically linked to the European project of Enlightenment and to the idea of society as a self-constituting and autonomous entity. Societies are constructed, not pre-established, and their construction is based on political choice. Social integration is a form of active creation and design, neither a divine gift nor grounded in nature. In the European history of modernity, the meaning of integration has been related to state building combined with nation building and society building. Social integration connotes a political society (Nassehi, 2002) that is approached through narratives related to citizenship, popular sovereignty, and ultimately also democracy. A democratic project triggers processes of society building in a manner that permits the application of indicators and tools to measure the project's success or failure in terms of institutionalisation, consolidation, social cohesion, and collective identity.

It has been critically questioned whether this vocabulary of social integration is at all applicable to the project of European integration (Offe, 2003). The burden of proof regarding the viability of European integration as a society-building project is high, and I doubt that this question can be answered with scientific authority. To expect European Studies to develop a blueprint for a European society or even to advise EU institutions on how to promote the social integration of Europe is to misunderstand our discipline. Our scientific self-restriction follows from the insight that social integration is ultimately based upon political choices, must thus be negotiated, and all too often is subject to fierce contestation among the different parties that wish to have a say in the design of such a project. What we know and what we can describe is that the vocabulary of social integration has been applied to contest the political project of Europe. We look back at a history of institution building, the binding forces of law, the expectations raised by European citizenship and the various practices of free movement, the use of rights, the pooled sovereignty of the member states and their peoples, the self-proclaimed aims and *finalité* of the European Union, and the democratisation process into which the EU entered a number of decades ago. The EU is consolidating, but we do not know precisely what is being consolidated. European integration progresses, but we cannot see the point of arrival. We live in an incomplete building, an always-incomplete construction site, and we witness the daily struggle among its many architects. Such an inbuilt incompleteness is not uncommon but is part of the imagination of Europe. Integration is a possibility and not yet a reality. As such, it drives our utopian thinking of Europe. The idea of Europe being on the move towards unknown a destination relates, in fact, to an old metaphor for Europe as departure, travel, and adventure.

Europe as our departure, travel, and adventure
The late Zygmunt Bauman spoke of Europe as a site of adventure (Bauman, 2004: 3). Such adventurous travels are collectively remembered in the kidnapping of princess Europa by Zeus, the conquests of ancient empires, the Crusades, and the discoveries – all stories of movement and travel between distant places. Europe has first and foremost been linked to the imagination of a land stretching beyond the local and the activity of distinct peoples, who left their sedentary lives behind. Europe is not *heimat*; Europe is departure. Yet Europe is also associated with a new form of imagining the social beyond the private and the familiar life. The story of Europe is told as a collective adventure requiring cooperation and socialisation among these distinct peoples, who are of different origins but are united in collective endeavour. This is the founding myth of European civilisation as a cooperative adventure of the Pilgrims, the Crusaders, and the missionaries, who were fellow travellers in foreign lands as well as individual heroes in their quests for the unique. The history of European civilisation can thus be told as a sequence of adventures of collective undertakings by Europeans.

Europe's foundational myth as departure and collective adventure explains some of the difficulties associated with intellectual efforts to establish the core idea of what Europe stands for. There is no fixed schedule that coordinates the travel dates, and there is no guidebook. Neither is there a common point of departure, nor can there be agreement as to the destination of travel. This does not mean that the question of 'what Europe stands for' cannot be raised. To the contrary, and throughout history, we find continual effort to harmonise the schedule, to set rules for fellow travellers, and to envisage an ultimate destination (or a *finalité*, as this has been labelled in more recent EU parlance). Europeans are familiar with these contestations of their trajectories. They are experienced fellow travellers who know how to steer a boat on unknown seas. The metaphor for expressing this inconclusive contestation of the common itinerary was found in the formula of *unity in diversity*.

Europe as our promised land

The idea of Europe as travel delivers only an incomplete template for propagating a promised land or a utopia for the project of integration. With regard to the development of utopian visions, Europeans have always been bad storytellers, partly because European integration emerged and was mainly promoted by people who rejected such societal utopias. Europe should be secular, not Christian; it should be individualised and liberal, not communist. Especially after the Second World War, Europe became the substitute utopia (*Utopieersatz*). The tradition of the founding fathers of the European Communities nevertheless sought to establish a heroic account of European integration, which was precisely grounded in this triumph of Europe over nationalism. In this narrative, the new heroes were bureaucrats, and their piecemeal contributions were to the progress in erecting the European building.

Europe was in this sense never the promised land of milk and honey. It was not the Holy Land that was promised by God, nor was it the New World that was conquered by the immigrants. Nobody became homeless in Europe and had to depart for the conquest of new worlds. Europe was still the old world, which tried to overcome the burden of national pasts. Yet, Europe was at the same time constituted by nations and their particular pasts and futures. The rejection of utopia has in this sense become part of the secular and critical self-understanding of Europe, but the absence of utopia has also meant a significant self-restraint in its expansion. We can call this the founding paradox of the European Union: a postnational entity that is built out of nations. In their own self-descriptions, EU institutions and leaders have repeatedly referred to a premodern legitimating formula to connote such *unity in diversity* as a hallmark of Europe. *Unity in diversity* proved politically powerful as a formula for universal inclusion while at the same time permitting various layers of internal and external delimitation. Yet, it left the question of Europe's political form undecided and established no positive value on which to ground European integration.

This task to find a political form for Europe with which people could not only identify but also be empowered was taken over by the French Revolution and the propagation of what Étienne Balibar (2014) called *égaliberte*. As a new secular means of unification, *égaliberte* was powerfully linked to the civilising mission of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. As such, it constituted the European nation-state and allowed for a new collective departure through the renewal of the universal civilising effort of European civilisation, which justified and even called for global expansion. The French Revolution also entrenched a new tension between two different kinds of rights in the constitution of the modern nation-state: equality (the social rights and the guarantee of collective political representation) and liberty (the individual freedom of citizens). This modern

proposition of *égaliberté* adds to the pre-modern proposition of *unity in diversity* as a supplementary formula for the uniqueness that binds Europeans together. Its realisation remains, however, bound to the consolidated form of the European nation-state. Applied to the EU, the proposition of *égaliberte* would require a more consolidated and unified European Union, less as an empire or as a loose governance arrangement than as a democratic entity that is not too dissimilar from existing state structures (Schmalz-Bruns, 2007).

Europe as our strange land: disintegration

When Neil Fligstein (2008) published his book *Euroclashes* in 2008, he wished to introduce a paradigm shift in the study of European integration, moving from an emphasis on integration to a study of conflict. The conflicts he had in mind were not simply the results of intergovernmental bargaining in the defence of national interests. Fligstein referred to social conflicts between various stakeholders, political parties, and civil society as well as to conflicts of public opinion about what the EU stands for and where it is heading. Such dynamics of conflicts are of particular interest to us because they structure a European social space. Conflicts are linked to a constituting power of an emerging European polity, but they also accompany the emergence of a European society (Fossum and Trenz, 2006). The Euroclashes were a symptom of EU polity building that was related to a parallel process of European society building. However, ten years after the publication of this influential book, we can no longer be so certain of the applicability of these mechanisms of a functional perspective on conflicts as the motor of social structuring and society building.[4]

Political and societal conflicts have an integrative function as long as societies can rely on a paradigm of growth and as long as conflicts can be turned into win-win situations for all. The Europe of equal living conditions or an ever-growing European market are important reference points for such a struggle, allowing competing parties to bring their interests into play and to claim their share of the booty. The experience of economic and financial crisis, which has shattered Europe and the world since 2008, has also disrupted these interest games within a Common Market that, unlike national welfare states, had no inbuilt redistributive mechanisms but only allowed its members to share the surpluses of economic growth. It is thus no overstatement to call this new situation a 'crisis'. We speak of crisis because our existing paradigm of dealing with social problems, explaining them, and applying solutions to them no longer holds, and no new paradigm for replacing it is in sight (Guiraudon et al., 2015). A crisis is not paradigm shift but is paradigm lost. A crisis leads to disruption: the inequality and the injustices of world politics became defining moments of internal European politics. The horizon of a Europe of equal living conditions is lost to sight, institutions cannot even uphold the status quo, populations are divided, and governments become enemies: the new rupture between North and South, the Brexit rupture, the Ukraine crisis and the role of Russia, and finally -- perhaps most significantly – the new (and old) East-West divisions between authoritarianism and liberalism. The struggle over a European political order is no longer a struggle over an equal share of a growing market; it has become a struggle over our fundamental values and the future of democracy.

Political scientists who consider the institutional and administrative apparatus of the EU have pointed to its capacities for adaptation, coping with crisis, or even expanding its competences (Schimmelfennig, 2014). Functionalism may not be dead, but even if functional logics still apply, the fact that they now support a logic of differentiated integration

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[4] See also my own work at that time, with an attempt to analyse such self-constituting processes of society with reference to public sphere mechanisms, called 'democratic functionalism' (Trenz and Eder 2004).

and a Europe of different speeds raises some fundamental concerns (Fossum, 2015). Differentiated integration has the potential to redirect the idea of European unification in fundamental ways. It is difficult to see how a differentiated European Union would not also enhance inequalities and injustices. Differentiation therefore simultaneously means the consolidation of a Europe of unequal living conditions. A differentiated European integration leads to hegemony and dominance. Power is exercised but cut off from its sources of legitimation (Eriksen, 2014).

Europe as trauma

The postwar triumph of Europe over the nation-state has turned into a post-crisis trauma. European integration has long been synonymous with progress, not just economic growth but also integration towards a more just and more equal society, the idea of *égaliberté*. One symptom of the trauma is that this belief is now unconvincing. If European integration as an idea for optimizing progress no longer convinces, then it is difficult to find any justification that could replace it.

European Studies scholars are not in the position to formulate the new paradigm of integration. What we can do as sociologists is to collect the symptoms of collective trauma in the ways in which crisis is communicated and translated into social mobilisation, into practices of resilience and resistance. A shared characteristic of public communications or discourses of crisis is that they challenge and contest political legitimacy in more fundamental ways. They call not for policy reform but for a political re-ordering and re-constitution. Such struggles are fought transnationally by targeting the EU (Eurosceptic parties being their main promoters), but even more fiercely, they are fought domestically, targeting the integrity of nation-states and national societies (with regionalist and populist parties and movements being their main proponents). In the European arena, we observe such 'system opposition' in the ways in which the fundamental legitimacy of the EU is challenged by Eurosceptic parties. This is also evident in the return of power politics between EU governments, for instance regarding the contestation of core and periphery relationships. The EU's legitimacy is also fundamentally challenged by the translation of emerging social divisions into new class conflicts and by the manner in which alternatives to capitalism are discussed. Last but not least, we observe a fundamental struggle over rights and their carriers, for instance in how the long taken for granted framework of EU citizenship has changed meaning in the context of crisis, how rights are claimed for and by different kinds of people affected by crisis, and how such contestations restructure a European political and social space. There remains the open question of whether such contestations can trigger a new integrative dynamic or will pave the way for the disintegration of Europe.

From integration to disintegration

In his book *Is the EU doomed?*, Jan Zielonka (2012: 3) ironically observes that the EU studies community has invested all its efforts into the formulation of a theory of integration but has completely forgotten to think about a theory of disintegration. This lack of a theory of disintegration is also discussed by Ivan Krastev (2017) in a recent essay called 'After Europe'. For Krastev, such a theory of disintegration is an impossibility. One of the reasons for the lack of such a theory is that we face obvious difficulties even knowing when disintegration is occurring. How can we distinguish between disintegration, reform, and institutional change? Is a Europe of different speeds a sign of disintegration or evidence of further integration? As sociologists, we often observe that differentiation happens, and we can approach the EU as an ideal case of differentiated integration. But how do we distinguish differentiation from disintegration? Emile Durkheim, who wished to

distinguish between differentiation as functional for society and fragmentation as a pathological development, has provided direction for several generations of sociologists who continue to disagree about the parameters that could allow them to decide upon the success of social integration and about the conditions in which functional differentiation becomes pathological fragmentation. Krastev also mentions the irony of discussing disintegration in the post-Lisbon EU, which is *de facto* more integrated than ever. All measures taken by the Euro group to secure financial stability, for instance, speak instead to integration and to the further allocation of competences at a supranational level. Responses to crisis have been formulated in such a way as to strengthen EU institutions or agencies, and in cases such as cooperation in security or border controls, new EU competences even become consensual and approved by the populations.

These difficulties in establishing what disintegration is are not unrelated to our decades of academic struggle over the meaning of integration. What follows from Zielonka's witticism regarding a lack of a theory of disintegration is that there is likewise disagreement regarding what constitutes a 'good' and 'adequate' theory of integration. There are, of course, entire handbooks dedicated to European integration theory, and we continue to devote time to discussing integration theories in our European Studies courses and conferences. In scrutinising these theories, we struggle not only with causal mechanisms and the status of norms and interests but also, on a much more fundamental level, cannot even agree upon the *explanandum* for such a theory. Some theories *de facto* only explain state cooperation, others explain the expansion of markets, others emphasise the binding forces of law, while others still focus on institution building or the iron cage of bureaucracy. For some, European integration is choice, and for others, it is destiny. Some see path dependencies where others see deep ruptures. EU scholars and EU bureaucrats are often accused of a lack of visionary thinking. In light of this creativity of EU scholars in drafting and redrafting integration theories and their passion for discussing them in their scientific publications and conferences, it would be unfair to call them non-visionary. There is certainly no lack of imagination regarding how integration might be possible and the destination to which it should be heading. There is also no lack of imagination in the depiction of different scenarios for how Europe is expected to fall apart. We have, in short, many different visions of what integration is about, which lead to just as many divisions within our scholarly community.

In this current situation, I do not regard agreement upon the formulation of a new theory of European integration as the most urgent task for the European Studies community. Nor do I think it necessary or even feasible to replace integration theory with a theory of disintegration. My own proposal would instead be to turn these different visions and divisions about how Europe is possible or impossible into our *explanandum*. We should explain how Europe is imagined by different people and how these people translate such imaginaries into political choices. What is interesting about such political choices is not just how they are implemented and take effect. All the more relevant is that such choices can be supported and rejected, that they allow the building of coalitions between the European but might also divide them, both nationally and transnationally. Controversy over the different visions of European integration lies at the heart of the process of the politicisation of the EU (Statham and Trenz, 2013). I thus see the politicisation of the EU as a process of reintroducing political choice. The politicisation of the EU takes its starting point from such alternative interpretations about what Europe stands for and where it is heading. But the very fact that such alternatives exist also tells us that European integration has become choice and is no longer destiny. Europe can be shaped or, in more normative terms, it can be democratically constituted. By the same token, we can also opt for – rather than be forced to endure – disintegration. We can discuss whether we want more or less Europe, or even no Europe.

Conclusion: new visions (or renewed visions?) of European integration

The *Zeitkritik* of many illustrious colleagues who have recently published on Europe is gloomy. Most of the intellectual efforts to attempt a prognosis of future scenarios of European integration end up with an almost apocalyptic picture: Jan Zielonka (2012) has asked whether the EU is doomed and more recently sees us in the midst of an anti-liberal counterrevolution (Zielonka, 2018). Claus Offe (2015) writes of a "Europe entrapped," and Ivan Krastev (2017) calls his inspiring essay 'After Europe' (the German translation is sold with a hint of Wagner, under the title *Europadämmerung*).

The current crisis of the project of European integration places pressure on and raises expectations concerning the interdisciplinary European Studies community. We are expected to deliver diagnoses, but we are also asked for prognoses. Hauke Brunkhorst (2014) speaks of the duality of Europe, of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and reminds us that Europe has always been there to reinterpret our history of decay into a new emancipatory project. Allow me link up with this tradition and conclude with a more positive reflection on why I believe that our gloomy *Zeitkritik* already carries the germ of a renewed vision of Europe.

In the midst of the crisis, the European Commission has launched an initiative to create a new narrative for Europe: a narrative that convinces the people, that is able to mobilise them across Europe and across borders and that renews their enthusiasm for the European project.[5] Looking back at the history of political ideas that informed the project of European integration, such an idea for a new narrative for Europe probably represents a fundamental misunderstanding. Europe cannot simply be reinvented. A narrative cannot be constructed or imposed from above. In our search for possible new integration dynamics, we must look at the ways in which popular discontent finds expression in contemporary Europe, in which citizens experience European integration as crisis and trauma, and in which citizens themselves envision the major challenges ahead. In collecting the voice of popular discontent, we encounter very familiar visions of 'alternative Europes'. The main challenges that nourish citizens' dissatisfaction and frustration are related to deficits in the democratic process and to disenchantment with the old Enlightenment promise in four areas:

Increasing inequalities at a global scale: the egalitarian promise

Restrictions on freedom of speech and freedom of movement: the promise of freedom

Challenges to truth and rationality: the publics of Enlightenment

Regaining control: problem-solving capacities and efficiency of government – the sustainable development of democracy.

Perhaps Europeans are currently undergoing a collective learning process, which entails creating awareness of interdependencies, for instance, that there are no trade-offs between national solidarity and global solidarity and that the increasing inequalities at local and national scales are related to global injustices. People in Southern Europe in particular are already accumulating bitter experiences of how the insufficiencies of national governments are implicated in deficits in these four areas. Anyone who faces increasing inequality needs to learn that this cannot be solely explained by the failures of the EU or as a side effect of the Common Market or the Currency Union. He or she needs to understand that even where mistakes are made, these cannot be corrected simply by reinstating national government but are first and foremost related to a basic error in the construction of our nationally confined liberal democracies, which are unsuited for meeting global challenges. As illustrated by Brexit, it is by no means impossible to opt for disinte-

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gration, yet this is an option that remains built upon the fallacious denial of interdependencies. Once put into practice, disintegration will have real consequences and affect people's life chances and experiences. For the time being, the so-called return of nationalism is related to regressive movements at the global scale, which all too often have their own interests for blocking such learning processes and, in addition, dispose of cultural and media power to impose their worldviews and interpretations. There is no return of nationalism. There is only a new nationalism, which turns the belief in popular sovereignty into a fiction. If this new nationalism is the driver of disintegration, it too might fail to survive in the long run.

The simultaneity of new manifestations of nationalism and post-factionalism is not accidental. Manifestations of the new nationalism are blocked from any emancipatory potential and can only become post-factual, non-egalitarian, a threat to global peace, a denial of human rights, and a replacement of the efficiency of government by symbolic politics. Nationalism in contemporary Europe remains an available and popular option, but it lacks any progressive force linked to a common good beyond the particularity of local group interests. Being nationalist today does not mean defending progress; it usually means denial of global warming or of the validity of human rights. It means entering into new confrontations instead of seeking global cooperation, constructing harder borders, which dam global flows instead of regulating them and therefore contribute only to instability and insecurity. Nationalism once again becomes what it was just before the two World Wars: a major threat to global peace and to the survival of civilisation and humanity.

This is not to give the European Union a free pass, but it is a historical lesson for us all that we need more Europe, not less Europe. More Europe is a formula that stands for the continuation of the struggle to fulfil the Enlightenment promise, which is a promise that binds our destinies together at a global scale. If there will be revival of the narration of Europe, it will occur here: The Trumps of this world and the many new authoritarian leaders and movements within and outside Europe might point the way for such a revival of the European project of Enlightenment. By carefully observing the social mobilisations and critical discourses that drive the global public sphere, it cannot go unnoticed that citizens and audiences worldwide, with all the forms of entertainment and the many distractions offered by the new media, once more appreciate selected quality formats; search for a new seriousness; are on the look-out for media formats that comply with quality standards in terms of rationality, aesthetics, and cultural values and truth. The European Union might take its chance to offer just this. A balanced and equilibrated perspective on the complexity of our world, the gathering of expertise, and a serious yet modest commitment to handle our problems collectively might be sufficient to satisfy the needs and demands of future generations of Europeans.

Let us be critical, and let us despair, as citizens and as scholars with our subject of Europe. We observe Europe, and especially liberal Europe, in retreat. We find many reasons to be shocked and alarmed by this withdrawal from Europe, which challenges our self-understanding as European scholars but also pushes us to ask more radical questions about the viability of the European integration process and about possible alternatives. If we do this and take our job as critical scholars seriously, we are in the best tradition of carrying the European project forward. Our journey towards an unknown destination can continue.

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