



Jean Monnet Chair Blog on Europe Competition 2017

## The Duality of European Identity

*By Jack Fisher*

European identity has long been a contentious issue. The history of Europe (and indeed the world in the last five centuries) has been shaped by this often-fractious issue. However, despite the continent being closer than ever from a political standpoint, the meaning of European identity is more frayed than it has been for many years. First, it is helpful to define what I mean by “European Identity”. I mean the overarching idea of what it is to be a European and what values are suitable for the modern European continent. I will show that European identity is in flux, that two competing schools of thought dominate the discussion in this area, and that they are playing a dangerous tug-of-war over the future of European peace.

Firstly, there is the longstanding European identity which ruled over most European nations until the beginning of the twentieth century. I refer to this as **European Nationalism**. This identity is often ethno-nationalist and is based on the perception that Europe is synonymous with Christendom. This base belief permeates many European political parties averse to migration, globalisation and liberal reform. Though they might not openly say it, a deeply nativist streak is clearly prevalent through these parties. Examples of such parties include Hungary’s Fidesz (and even Jobbik), Poland’s Law and Justice Party and to a certain extent UKIP and the PVV of the Netherlands. These parties all have a modern version of the classical European view – that Europe is a civilised continent and a civilising force. Their movement (and current ascendancy) mirrors Trump in the United States. There is a deep emphasis on national customs and traditions and a relative dislike for the European project, instead preferring Nationalism.

The second European identity is a modern and liberal one. This form I call **European Cosmopolitanism**. Born during the enlightenment, this form of European identity favours social liberalisation and has little problem with migration. Rather than basing European identity on genetics, it favours unity based on shared values instead. Although there have been forerunners who shared these views it only took centre stage in the 1990’s, when European federalisation seemed to be over the horizon. These values include support for same-sex marriage, support for the European Union and low importance of religion (although this is not always the case). It is hard to find a party that sums up this form of identity as there is no set economic belief for this view. Perhaps the Liberal Democrats are the best example in the UK; however, many MPs in the Labour Party and Conservative Party also hold this view.

To simplify and boil it down to two cultural events, European Nationalism is the European football championship in the 80s, with hooliganism and racism, and European Cosmopolitanism is Eurovision with its bearded ladies and cringe-worthy songs, the meanings of which are often lost in translation. Without disparaging football, there must be another shift away from the right-wing nationalist European identity and towards modern European identity for the sake of social freedom and democracy.