Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe
(Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej)

Publication details, including instructions for authors:
http://www.iesw.lublin.pl/rocznik/index.php

ISSN 1732-1395

Overcoming Divides in the Contemporary EU: "Connectivity", Political Geography and Super Regions

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Published online: 22 Nov 2017

To cite this article: B. Presas Mata, 'Overcoming Divides in the Contemporary EU: "Connectivity", Political Geography and Super Regions', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2017, pp. 213-232.

Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe, 2017, Vol. 15, No. 2

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Overcoming Divides in the Contemporary EU: "Connectivity", Political Geography and Super Regions

Abstract: The objective of this paper is to examine the relationship between connectivity, considered how we make the most of geography, and nationalism, the long-lasting challenge that Europe has always faced. This paper considers that the process of integration in the European Union (EU) is no longer happening through nations, but through super regions—functionally connected entities that share key infrastructure, even when there is no clear geographical distinction. As these connections gain importance, nationalism decreases in strength. The first section provides an overview of nationalism in Europe, citing some current examples and relating it to the lack of a European identity. The second section defines the idea and extension of super regions and, using the core-periphery theory, explains "multi-speed" Europe. The next part will be devoted to the concept and implications of connectivity and the role of communication and data in cross-border flows. The last part draws a general picture of a Europe of super regions.
Keywords: connectivity, nationalism, super region, geography, identity

Introduction

In the 18th century, the French philosopher Ernest Renan ventured that a union of European states will eventually happen:

> "Nations are not eternal. They have a beginning and they will have an end. A European confederation will probably replace them. But, if so, such is not the law of the century in which we live. At the present time, the existence of nations is a good and even a necessary thing"[1].

1 E. Renan, *What is a nation?,* Conference delivered at the Sorbonne, 1882, http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf [2017-09-15].

Almost two centuries later, Renan's vision seems to have pragmatized; yet, the EU is living in uncertain times. The spread of nationalistic movements, the worst refugee crisis ever lived on the continent, and the vote of the United Kingdom (UK) to leave the EU (Brexit) have challenged the "European project" and its relevance.

Connectivity becomes more important than ever for the future of the EU, which is caught between struggles of democracy and nationalism. Connectivity means overcoming cartography and the traditional way of representing the world for making the most of our geography. As Khanna explains it, connectivity "is not about detaching from geography but making the most of it."[2]

Traditionally, political geography was considered the most accurate science for defining where countries are and how they relate to each other. For political geography, borders matter because they show the end of a state and, consequently, the beginning of a new one. However, recent times have seen a rise in the power of infrastructure: states are concerned about how to maximize their land, labor and capital to connect them to global markets.

New information and communications technologies (ICT) and the resultant increased data flows have created a new reality: communities are no longer exclusively based on physical proximity.[3] This idea has changed the main definition of "region" and made it more and more difficult to tell where one starts and another ends. Integration in the EU is no longer happening though nations, but through super regions, i.e., functionally connected countries that share key infrastructure. As connectivity gains importance, nationalism decreases in strength. This is especially relevant for East-Central Europe (ECE), a region characterized by nation-states due to the diversity of ethnicities. By the time West Europe was full of states, the ECE still lacked formed states, which combined with numerous ethnicities acted as an accelerator for the creation of new nation-states during a longer period.

This paper analyzes how connectivity and nationalism are two opposite trends happening in the European Union. So, how can con-

2 P. Khanna, *Connectography*, New York: Random House, 2016, p. 6.
3 Ibid., p. 7.

nectivity respond to the challenges that Europe faces? Is the Europe of super regions the answer and explanation to the time we are living in? To answer these questions, this paper first provides an overview of nationalism in Europe, citing some current examples and relating it to the lack of a European identity. Then, this paper defines the idea and extension of super regions and, using the core-periphery theory, explains multi-speed Europe. The next part is devoted to the concept and implications of connectivity and the role of communications and data in cross-border flows. The last part draws a general picture of a Europe of super regions.

1. Nationalism, an Enduring Challenge

Nationalism is not a new problem, but a long-lasting challenge for Europe. Defined as "the identification of people with the territorial nation state,"[4] nationalism is a historically modern attitude that can be dated beginning with the French Revolution and the concept of "patriotism." Yet, patriotism is considered a positive feeling consistent with the celebration of one's own country.

Since the beginning of the modern era, nationalism has developed differently in Western and Eastern Europe. These areas are clearly differentiated in the aftermath of the Second World War, when the term ECE was formulated. The ECE is associated with the entrance of the Soviet Union, "the rebellious heir of the old Russian Empire of the Tsars, into a geographical area that—previously partitioned by three great empires, [including] Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Russia, re-gained independence following [World War II]."[5] The ECE is a region characterized by "nation-states" because "national identities were forged within multi-national empires prior to and as the basis of a political program to obtain an independent state,"[6] whereas states already existed in the West.

After the First World War, nationalism and its idea of nation-state succeeded and "self-determination was accepted in princi-

4 S. J. Woolf, *Nationalism in Europe, 1815 to the present*, Routledge: New York, 2002, p. 2.
5 M. Filipowicz, 'The idea of East-Central Europe and its role in shaping the logic behind Eastern Partnership', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, Vol. 14, No. 6, 2016, p. 71.
6 S. J. Woolf, *Nationalism in Europe, 1815 to the present*, Routledge: New York, 2002, p. 16.

ple, if not always in practice, for allocating territory in the peace settlements"[7] (Anderson, 2000:2). In Western Europe, nationalism reached its more extremist positions and attitudes in the interwar period through the fascist and national-socialist ideologies unfolding primarily in Germany and Italy through the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini.

The defeat of fascism and Nazism in the Second World War gave birth to a period in which nationalism was supposedly dead. Yet, the social democratic period started after the Second World War has strengthened identification with nations because of the benefits that states provided. Besides that, since nationalism is based on the differentiation of "us" and the "other," it can always exist and reinvent itself. It is precisely this idea of the "other' that is exploited and developed during times of hardship for reclaiming the unity of the nation. This is because "national identity depends on exclusion as much as on inclusion: the foreigner whose expulsion is a precondition of national independence, or the ethnic minority whose pretensions threaten national unity, are the functional counterpart to the symbolic and material mechanisms of forging national cohesion, present in most historical processes of nation-building. But the definitions of who should be included and who excluded are fundamentally arbitrary."[8]

The most evident manifestations of today's nationalism are "a stronger determination on the part of governments to defend their national self-interest and, secondly, the rise of right-wing populist nativism" (NYT, 2016). Main political parties on the extreme right, composed of Eurosceptics and against migration and refugee flows have developed in core countries of the EU community. Alternative for Germany is anti-everything considered the norm. In France, National Front has regained wide public support. The party was founded in 1972 and its current main figure is Marine Le Pen, who took over leadership from her father but has softened the extremist language and image it used to have. In the Netherlands, the Party for Freedom has been gaining a lot of support. The party has called for "recording the ethnicity of

7 M. Anderson, *States and nationalism in Europe since 1945*, Routledge: New York, 2000, p. 2.
8 S.J. Woolf, op. cit., p. 32.

all Dutch citizens."[9] The spread of right-wing movements has been happening all over Europe, even in smaller countries: Greece (Golden Dawn), Hungary (Jobbik), Sweden (Sweden Democrats), Austria (Freedom Party) and Slovakia (People's Party-Our Slovakia). Extreme left-wing populism has also appeared in Europe; yet not been as strong as the right wing. Some examples of this are Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece; yet, Podemos quickly lost support.

Nationalism has found fertile ground in the difficulties in defining European identity, which has been debated since the beginning of the project but, especially, after the Treaty of Maastricht created European citizenship. The question is if the European identity is in conflict with the national identity and, if yes, how "the European identity *must* and/or *can* displace national identities in order to advance further the progress of European integration and political community."[10] What is certain is that the European nation-state "resembling the American federal system may depend on a paradigmatic shift in which the people of Europe adopt a common collective identity and favor it over their national identity."[11] Arguably, the main threat for the creation of this European identity is the main claim of nationalism: that national identity is fixed and cannot coexist with any other sort of identity, like gender, religion or ethnicity.

Nowadays, the European identity is perceived more as being part of a relevant political system: "a civic European identity currently predominates over a cultural one (...) It is an identity grounded in a civic community unified by common institutions, rules, and rights."[12] It is not clear if this European political identity will conform with the EU as a political community, or if the process will be the other way around.

Political solidarity has not been fully developed. The Charter of Fundamental Rights solemnly proclaimed in the Treaty of Nice (2000) addresses "only citizen and human rights, without explicit reference to the duties and obligations of citizens such as paying taxes and con-

9 Editorial team, 'Europe's rising far right: A guide to the most prominent parties', *The New York Times*, 4 December 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/world/europe/europe-far-right-political-parties-listy.html?_r=0 [2017-09-15].

10 C.A. Gould, M.A. Messina, *Europe's contending identities*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 2.

11 Ibid., p. 29.

12 Ibid.

tributing to public social insurance programs—not to speak of social or military service."[13] This also applies to European symbols, which are less powerful and significant than national ones. The only ones that have really succeeded are the European flag and the EU currency—the euro. Besides that, Europe no longer has the vision of the "other": both the loss of the United States (US) and the Soviet Union as the "other" are important reasons that might explain the lack of identification with Europe.[14]

The evolution of European identity patterns seems to be motivated first by European citizenship feelings, values and rights: "Respondents [to Eurobarometer 2015] understand the term 'citizen of the EU' to mean anyone who is, or who becomes, a citizen of any EU member state. EU citizenship is also seen as closely related to having similar rights and obligations in each member state."[15] *Europeanization* is the trend that symbolized the new way of interaction between the nation-state and Europe. It is a positive-sum nature: "One can be French, say, and at the same time, European; identities, European or national, do not wax or wane at each other's expense. Instead, they are often nested in complex and variegated patterns for different individuals and groups, and are triggered in specific situations leading to different kinds of politics."[16]

This is the idea of post-national citizenship, which implies that citizenship is no longer only based on national identity but on the idea that the nation-state cannot capture exclusively "the needs and demands of the subject for identification and expression as it fails to grasp the importance of non-national collectivities. Post-national citizenship conveys the desire and aspiration for a multifaceted and pluralistic understanding of citizenship identities and solidarities."[17] This post-national citizenship offers the possibility to accommodate the political references in different political sites.

13 J.T. Checkel, P.J. Katzenstein, *European Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 206.
14 Loc. cit., p. 206.
15 H. Zimmerman, A. Dür, *Key controversies in European integration*, London: MacMillan Education, 2012, p. 105.
16 J.T. Checkel, P.J. Katzenstein, loc. cit., p. 10.
17 M. Lister, E. Pia, *Citizenship in contemporary Europe*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008, p. 79.

For Habermas, the age of post-nationalism has arrived: "For if state sovereignty is no longer conceived as indivisible but shared with international agencies; if states no longer have control over their national territories; and if territorial and political boundaries are increasingly permeable, the core principles of democratic liberty—that is, self-governance, the demos, consent, representation, and popular sovereignty—are more distinctly problematic."[18] Democratic regionalism, expressed by the example of the EU, could provide "the necessary infrastructure for the democratic coordination of processes of globalization in the absence of a global government."[19]

The post-nation state could find an argument in the fact that the EU has no internal borders, a main characteristic of the concept of state (a territory with a clear division of borders); and yet, there are two divisions that must be considered in the Union. The first one is between EU and non-EU countries; the second, is the divide between the Schengen area and the non-Schengen world. The Schengen area is an area without an internal border based on a treaty signed in 1985 between the participating countries called the Schengen Agreement, which led to the removal of border controls between them. By 2012, the only EU countries that were out of the area were the UK, Ireland, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania; and some non-EU countries were associated, namely, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Lichtenstein.

2. Connectivity in a Europe of Super Regions

The concept of super regions captures the idea of sharing key infrastructure. It does not only refer to a larger physical space but also to the number of connections that countries or territories that form part of the same super region share. In this sense, connections refer to the flow of goods, services, finance, people and data. In other words, regions are based on the traditional political geography, considering that borders between countries define where one country ends and another starts. A region would only be the aggregation of countries

18 J. Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation and the Future of Democracy*, Cambridge: MIT, 2001.
19 A. Lupel, 'Regionalism and globalization: post-nation or extended nation?', *Polity*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 2004, https://www.ipinst.org/images/pdfs/lupel_polity_jan2004.pdf [2017-09-15].

that share something in common. Yet, super regions are based on functional geography, which does not consider borders, but infrastructure. For functional geography it is not important where a country is located in terms of its borders, but with what other countries it shares infrastructure. In this sense, super regions are not always the addition of whole countries, but also of territories or regions that share common infrastructure. The unit for considering the level of connections among super regions and/or countries is connectivity. Connectivity can be defined as "how we make the most of our geography (...) It is not about detaching from geography but making the most of it."[20] Its measure is connectedness, which is "the paramount factor in determining the importance of a state, rather than its locations or population. It refers to how connected a state is, physically, economically, digitally, to flows of resources, capital, data, talent, and other valuable assets."[21] The most powerful states in a newly delineated world are, therefore, the most connected ones.

The concept of super region was very precisely described by the financial journalist Delamaide after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It was meant to consider how the end of communism had altered and changed the European geography. Delamaide expressed the new configuration of Europe in terms of super regions and described 10 of them: the Latin Crescent, the Baltic League, the Atlantic Coast, Mitteleuropa,[22] the Capital District, Financial District, the Alpine Arc, Danube Basin, the Balkan Peninsula, and the Slavic Federation.

The Latin Crescent was the arc around the Western Mediterranean and used to be the heart of the Roman Empire. It includes most of Spain (except for the northwest corner), southern Portugal, southern France and most of Italy (except for the Alps in the north and the Adriatic region in the northeast).

The Baltic League was the one that benefited from the demise of communism (which used to block commerce in the area). It includes all the areas bordering the Baltic Sea: Sweden, Finland, the interior of

20 P. Khanna, loc. cit., p. 6.
21 Loc. cit., p. 41.
22 *Mitteleuropa* was not first used by Delamaide. M. Filipowicz considered Mitteleuropa has been in use a hundred of years ago in Germany when referring to the ECE in a more geopolitical dimension.

Russia down to St. Petersburg, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the coastal regions of Poland and Germany, the eastern half of Denmark, and the corner of Norway.

The Atlantic Coast includes the island of Great Britain and Ireland, and all the western coast of Europe (northern Portugal, northwestern Spain, western coasts of France, Belgium and the Netherlands, and Germany to Hamburg, through the center of Denmark and the Norwegian-Swedish border. Delamaide considered that "the ability of the region [the Atlantic Coast] to act as a bridge between Europe and America, and the rest of the world will determine its future."[23]

Mitteleuropa is the industrial center of Europe, the richest and most powerful super region. It includes all of Germany between Hamburg in the north and Munich in the south, most of Belgium and the Netherlands, Luxembourg, northern and central France, the northwestern corner of Switzerland, the Czech Republic, and western Poland.

The Capital District includes Brussels, Paris and Strasbourg. When Delamaide wrote the book, he considered this triangle of cities as the place where the main European Community (EC) institutions are headquartered. Nowadays, it still remains the area where the main EU institutions have their headquarters. Paris was and is, in many ways, the cultural capital of Europe.

The Financial District is the City of London, which is not only the financial center of Europe, but a major center for global finances.

The Alpine Arc is a very small region in the Alps acting as a bridge between Mitteleuropa and the Latin Crescent. It includes the Alpine regions of France, most of Switzerland, western Austria, a corner of Italy down to Milan, and a corner of Germany.

The Danube Basin includes the areas that follow the Danube: east of Munich, eastern Austria, Slovakia, all of Hungary and Romania, the former Soviet republic of Moldova, the north of Bulgaria, Slovenia and Croatia and northern Italy.

The Balkan Peninsula is a poor and nationalist-driven region. It includes Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania, Greece, southern Bulgaria, and the part of Turkey that is in Europe.

23 D. Delamaide, *The new superregions of Europe*, New York: Penguin Group, 1995, p. 18.

The Slavic Federation includes the new nations in the European part of the former Soviet Union: Ukraine, Belarus, western Russia, eastern Poland. It is an important bridge between Asia and Europe.

Delamaide's division of Europe is an old but accurate one. It describes a Europe of super regions in which territories are considered as something other than just nations. His map is based on infrastructure, rather than on borders.

In terms of EU policy, regions are already being considered, even when still defined as the addition of countries or the internal divisions of a nation. Again, political geography. The Maastricht Treaty established the principle of subsidiarity; a Committee of the Regions, which was meant to advise the European Council and Commission[24]; and the Cohesion Fund, the purpose of which is to reduce economic disparities by helping member states whose Gross National Income is less than 90% of the EU average.[25] Regional policy in the EU has as its focus giving support to less-developed regions in four priority areas: research and innovation, information and communications technologies, making small and medium-sized businesses more competitive, and moving towards a low-carbon economy.[26] Nowadays, regional policy is delivered through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund. National and regional authorities, with the help of the European Commission, are responsible for managing the funds. These managing authorities "select, finance and monitor the projects that can best help to serve local needs. They provide information on funding opportunities to potential beneficiaries, including public bodies, the private sector, universities and associations or NGOs."[27]

Similarly, trends in Europe seem to be giving relevance to the devolution of power from central governments to regions, which is happening in Spain, France and Portugal (and already did in Germany and Italy, which have strong regions).

24 P. Gripaios, T. Mangles, 'An analysis of European Super Regions', *Regional Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 8, 1993, pp. 745-750, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00343409312331347925 [2017-09-15].

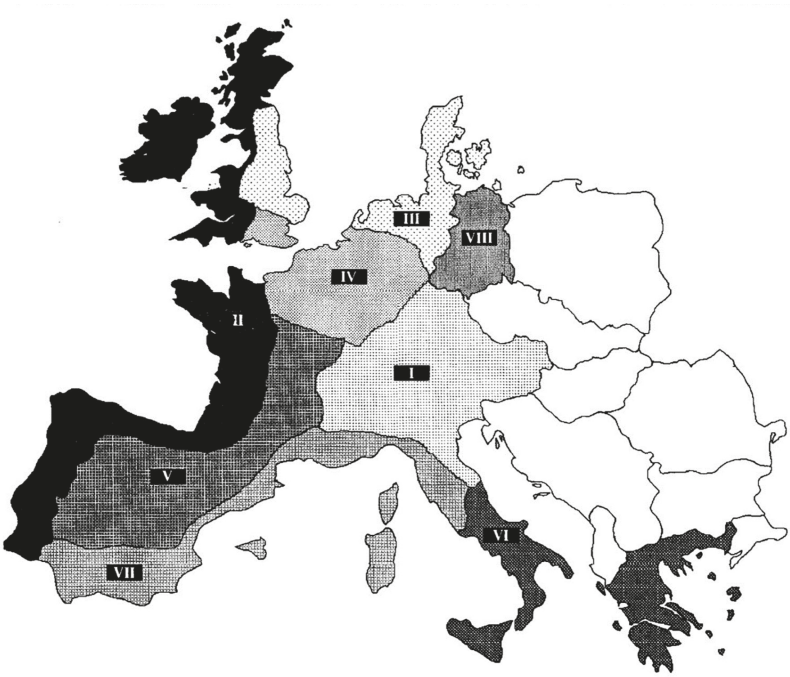
25 European Commission (EC), 'Regional Policy', *Inforegio*, http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/ [2017-09-15].

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

Regions have created new networks and forms of cooperation "to reap the benefits of economy of scale, technology transfer, and increased efficiency through joint ventures."[28] In their research, Gripaios and Mangles examined if there was an economic case in terms of spatial coherence for the particular regions they considered Europe was divided into. They determined there were eight regions: I (Alpine Regions); II (Atlantic Arc); III (Northern Arc); IV (Central Capitals); V (Diagonal Continental); VI (Central Mediterranean); VII (West Mediterranean); VIII (New German Lander).

Figure 1: Map of European Super Regions According to Gripaios and Mangles



Some of the conclusions of Gripaios and Mangles' research were that the northern part of Europe is more "buoyant" than the southern. "Average unemployment levels tend to be over twice as high in the 'south' (...) From a study of country data, it is obvious the exist-

28 P. Gripaios, T. Mangles, op. cit.

ence of very considerable north-south and core-periphery divides."[29] The picture it reveals shows a multi-speed Europe, with Northern and Central Europe being richer and growing faster than the Southern and periphery parts. Krugman's theory of the new geography draws a similar picture in which there is an industrialization core and an agricultural periphery in the function of the location of demand itself depending on the distribution of manufacturing.[30]

Following Krugman's theory, Martin and Ottoviono tried to analyze how the existence of different speeds of integration can have an impact on the long-term characteristics of the integration, applied to the European case. They concluded that the process of the "economic geography of Europe will be transformed by the process of regional integration as it may imply concentration of economic activity in the 'core' countries (...) who will be integrated first and the length of the transition will define the long-term geography of Europe."[31]

The debate about the core-periphery is an ongoing one. New authors have considered that since the financial crisis that hit the Union in 2008, EU countries have begun a much more pronounced differentiation, both in horizontal and vertical terms. "The horizontal division, which used to concentrate on the Eurozone core vs. periphery dichotomy, has now been enhanced by the emergence of the later addition of the Euro Plus group and the intergovernmental Fiscal Compact."[32] Efforts at managing the crisis concentrated on Europe's core, leaving marginalized the Eastern periphery, which was forgotten. The growing distance between the core and the periphery was mainly the result of missing structural reforms: "The EU funding must aim to help these countries [in the periphery] to invest into the future and to carry out the necessary structural reforms."[33]

29 Loc. cit.

30 P. Krugman, 'Increasing returns and economic geography', *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 99, No. 3, 1993, https://www.princeton.edu/pr/pictures/g-k/krugman/krugman-increasing_returns_1991.pdf [2017-09-15].

31 M. Philippe, G. Ottaviano, 'The geography of multi-speed Europe', *Centre d'etudes prospectives et d'information internationales*, No. 10, 1995, http://cepii.fr/PDF_PUB/wp/1995/wp1995-10.pdf [2017-09-15].

32 C. Schweiger, 'The EU's multiple cores and the CEEs: a threat or an opportunity?', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, Vol. 11, Issue 3, 2013, pp. 27-46.

33 A. Ágh, 'The core-periphery divide in the EU transformation crisis: challenges to the Visegrád Four', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2016, pp. 113-130.

This multi-speed Europe is precisely one of the possible scenarios envisioned by the European Commission in the *White Paper on the Future of Europe*. The paper, written as a reflection of the uncertainty that Brexit has created over Europe, envisions five possible scenarios[34] for a Europe of 27: "The starting point for each scenario is that the 27 [member states] move forward together as a Union."[35] Multi-speed Europe is explained as a way to move ahead "with greater integration while others hold back. The unity of the EU27 is preserved while progress is made possible for those who want to do more."[36] Multi-speed Europe would allow a core of countries to have closer cooperation in terms of taxes, finance and security, leaving a peripheral group to continue in a looser integration format.

3. Connectivity and Communication

Connectivity includes connections of a different nature in the areas of goods, services, finance, people and data. In contemporary Europe, data flows are key for progress because they grow more slowly than trade, financial and people flows, "perhaps reflecting that digitization has a long way to go in all countries and it is a relatively young phenomenon."[37] To allow for an end to multi-speed Europe and true integration among and between super regions, poorer European super regions have to catch up by investing in strategic areas of general cross-border data flow.

With the explosion of new technologies started by the evolution of the internet, there are new and more complex forms of communica-

34 The other four possible scenarios developed by the European Commission in the *White Paper on the Future of Europe*, are: (1) Carrying on: the EU focuses on delivering its existing agenda; (2) Nothing but the single market: the EU27 only agrees on key aspects of the common market; (3) Doing less more efficiently: the EU27 focuses on delivering more and more faster in selected policy areas; (4) Doing much more together: Member states decide to do much more altogether across all policy areas.

35 European Commission, 'White Paper on the future of Europe: Reflections and Scenarios for the EU27 by 2025', 2017, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2017:2025:FIN [2017-09-15].

36 Raidio Teilifis Eireann (RTE), 'EU's Juncker lays out five pathways to unity', 1 March 2017, https://www.rte.ie/news/analysis-and-comment/2017/0301/856453-eus-juncker-publishes-white-paper/ [2017-09-15].

37 J. Manyija, S. Lund, J. Bughin, and others, 'Digital globalization: the new era of global flows', *McKinsey Global Institute (MGI)*, 2016, http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/digital-mckinsey/our-insights/digital-globalization-the-new-era-of-global-flows [2017-09-15].

tion. People, companies and countries interact though new channels. Data flows refer to "the transfer of information, or data, to go from point A to an eventual point B and beyond (...) placed in a global context, data flows which cross a country border are cross-border data flows."[38] In this sense, data flows are communication in the digital era, but communication after all.

The amount of cross-border bandwidth in use has grown "45 times larger since 2005. It is projected to increase by an additional nine times over the next five years as flows of information, searches, communication, video, transactions, and intracompany traffic continue to surge."[39] These data flows make possible the movement of information and ideas in their own right, and also, the movement of goods, services, finance, and people because they are the intelligence behind any of these. Despite the progress in cross-border data flows, it is still less in quantity compared to flows of trade, finance and people.

The discussion about the relevance of data flows is not a new one. Deutsch's theory is developed around security communities and information. His theory inspired transactionalism, also known as the communication or pluralist approach. For Deutsch, regional integration in the EU was based on the flow of information and goods and services "as proxies for the level and growth of a European community (...) He insisted on statistical measures that normalized absolute increase in European communications and transactions against the growth of comparable national figures."[40]

Transnationalism considers that the level of communication between states gives a sense of the depth of the community. The more interaction that exists "between state *a* and state *b*, so the greater that reciprocal importance (or 'mutual relevance') of *a* and *b* to one another. Perceptions that the interaction is beneficial will promote feelings of trust between *a* and *b*."[41]

Communication is relevant to the EU project in at least four ways. First, it helps with the creation of an individual and collective identity,

38 Coalition of Services Industries, 'Cross-border data flows', https://servicescoalition.org/services-issues/cross-border-data-flows [2017-09-15].
39 J. Manyija, S. Lund, J. Bughin, and others, op. cit.
40 J.T. Checkel, P.J. Katzenstein, loc. cit., p. 6.
41 B. Rosamond, *Theories of European integration*, New York: MacMillan, 2000, p. 44.

because as Walsh considers "the fundamental politically relevant act is the communication of information about the kind of people individuals perceive themselves to be and the collective envisioning of group and community boundaries."[42] Second, communication can help the EU better understand its citizens, "even 'emotionally,' and through this understanding the EU will be able to improve its institutions, politics and policies."[43] Third, communication is also important for producing democratic legitimacy through the use of public communication "aimed at providing information, raising awareness and influencing [citizens'] attitudes or even behavior towards specific issues and policies."[44] Fourth, communication through cross-border data flows can build common infrastructure that can help connect super regions.

Communication is key to the European project and yet, none of the foundational treaties of the EU have any direct allusion to communication policy in the EU. As explained by the European Parliament, "communication policy is not governed by specific provisions in the Treaties, but stems naturally from the EU's obligation to explain its functioning and policies, as well as European integration more generally, to the public."[45] According to the European Parliament, the need for communication has a legal basis in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. But the reality is that the Charter barely refers to communication, and then not directly. In Article 11, dedicated to the freedom of expression and information, the Charter states:

> "1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.

42 C. Walsh cited by S. Duchesne, 'Social Gap: The Double Meaning of Overlooking', Ch. 3, in: S. Duchesne, E. Frazer, F. Haegel, V. van Ingelgom (eds.), *Citizens' reactions to European integration compared*, New York: MacMillan, 2013, p. 67.

43 G. Nesti, *Public communication in the European Union: History, perspectives and challenges*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010, http://www.cambridgescholars.com/download/sample/60110 [2017-09-15].

44 Ibid.

45 European Political Strategy Centre, 'Enter the data economy: EU policies for a thriving data ecosystem', Issue 21, 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/epsc/sites/epsc/files/strategic_note_issue_21.pdf [2017-09-15].

2. The freedom and pluralism of the media shall be respected."[46]

Only one other reference to communication can be found in the document. Article 42 is dedicated to the right to access to documents:

"Any citizen of the Union, and any natural or legal person residing or having its registered office in a Member State, has a right of access to documents of the institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the Union, whatever their medium."[47]

There is no separate legal basis for communication in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), so any action at EU levels needs to refer to Article 352, which is actually an article about procedures and functioning when an action not covered by any treaty is needed:

"If action by the Union should prove necessary, within the framework of the policies defined in the Treaties, and the Treaties have not provided the necessary powers, the Council (...) shall adopt the appropriate measures"[48].

Despite the lack of a communication policy, the European Parliament defines communication as "a primary concern of the European institutions, with the aim of fostering trust in the European project"[49]. Parliament also defines the key purposes of communication in the EU:

"(1) Listening to the public, and taking their views and concerns into account; (2) Explaining how European Union policies affect citizens' everyday lives; (3) Connecting with people locally by addressing them in their national or local settings, through their favorite media."

The European Commission considered the limitations that public communication had in the Union in a white paper titled *European communication policy,* presented in 2006. The Commission stated that

46 European Union Law, 'Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union', 2012, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT [2017-09-15].
47 European Union Law, Loc. cit.
48 European Union Law, Loc. cit.
49 Commission of the European Communities, 'White paper on a European communication policy', 2006, http://europa.eu/documents/comm/white_papers/pdf/com2006_35_en.pdf [2017-09-15].

communication remained too much "a Brussels affair. It has focused largely on telling people what the EU does: less attention has been paid to listening to people's views (...) The European Commission is therefore proposing a fundamentally new approach—a decisive move away from an institution-centered to a citizen-centered communication. Communication should become an EU policy in its own right."[50] The paper proposed a more centered communication policy and the possible creation of a Charter or Code of Conduct on Communication, but it did not happen.

More progress has been done in terms of data regulation. The EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) "which regulates the processing and use of personal data in the EU, represents a first fundamental milestone to creating a data-friendly environment where citizens and companies feel confident that their privacy preferences are protected, while also safeguarding economic interests and innovation."[51]

Europe is starting to accept that progress must be made in terms of data retrieval and data-driven decision-making. To really build a data-driven economy, Europe "needs to dispel perceived uncertainties and overcome fragmented national environments. A sensible balance should be struck between data protection and consumer rights, on the one hand, and economic benefits and innovation on the other."[52] Progress in this area is not only key for economic development, but for creating and maintaining the connectivity and infrastructure that will build the Europe of the future.

Conclusions

For political geography, borders matter because they show the end of a state and, consequently, the beginning of a new one. However, for functional geography, infrastructure, not borders are relevant: states are concerned about how to maximize their land, labor and capital to connect them to global markets. This determines two oppos-

50 European Commission, 'White Paper on the future of Europe: Reflections and Scenarios for the EU27 by 2025', 2017, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2017:2025:FIN [2017-09-15].
51 European Political Strategy Centre. Loc. cit.
52 European Political Strategy Centre. Loc. cit.

ing trends: nationalism and political geography vs. connectivity and functional geography.

Considered the core-periphery division and the theory of super regions, the only way for the ECE to catch up with the rest of Europe is to build key infrastructure connected to the rest of the super regions. This connectivity through super regions is also key to overcoming Europe's long-lasting challenge: nationalism. This is more critical now than ever due to the rise of nationalist political parties all over Europe, which has been increased by the lack of a European identity.

Connectivity refers to connections in terms of flows of goods, services, finance, trade and data. As data flows are growing the slowest among them, they become the key to building the Europe of the future. Data flows are the new way of communication in the digital era, and cross-border data flows are the shared information infrastructure between countries. Communication becomes key for connectivity, not only because it builds common infrastructure through cross-border data flows but also because it helps create a common identity, to understand citizenship and to produce democratic legitimacy. The more the EU increases its connections, the less borders and nationalism matter.

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