

How Europe Is Seen From Outside (and Inside) the European Union: A Discussion Paper

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This paper presents the foundation for an assessment of the current views of Europe as seen from inside and outside of the European Union. The discussion paper introduces some of the factors that contribute to these perceptions, and how these perceptions are understood and seen by the residents inside and outside of the European Union. Once these opinions are identified, what future research and debates can be developed from this exploratory assessment? The present discussion carefully provides some of the factors that contribute to these perceptions of Europe by those living inside and outside of the European Union.

INTRODUCTION

In an attempt to understand what drives initiatives based on cultural differences and how social conformity impacts decisions that global leaders from outside the European Union struggle to make while respecting the diversity of the European countries, this paper researches some of the lenses that people in power outside the European Union use to develop integration policies addressing transcultural communications. While analyzing the psychological aspects and the relationship to elitist theory and power, this paper discusses the idea of different cultures being hardwired into their nation's political, economic, and educational grids.

FRAMEWORK

Most people agree that the concept of elite theory is a theory describing a situation that explains the power relationships in contemporary society. In order to understand how other cultures perceive Europe, we must first understand this concept of power. Aspects of collectivities give to elites their importance in political and social theory as well as economics. Yet, they are not limited to only established leaders, politicians, significant business entrepreneurs, and possibly military figures but also for example to relatively temporary and less known leaders in unions, international and national volunteer associations, and religious organizations. The spread of popular education and mass/social media brought a different and new voice to the discussion tables and aroused consciousness among the educated elite. Furthermore,

it raised the question of how this new and technology savvy elite could speak to the rest of the population on their behalf? Additionally, the problem of identity rears itself in asking if there was a moral bond between these groups and what that bond was by virtue of which they could claim to be a community? Relationships and their understanding of each other can be viewed as a heritage of the past and a need of the present. If a society developed and lived by values that were brought to it from the outside, it may imply an affinity and/or economic dependency toward that external influence. If such values rest on an unsound basis, the domination of a deciding elite and economic inequity, as well as the relationship between heritage and present needs, would be very different.

FINDINGS

As a European-born researcher living in the United States, it is interesting to note the very distinct differences regarding the complexity of and understanding about other cultures. For example, a recent Pew survey highlights how Americans are different from many others around the world on questions related to individualism, a value often associated with American exceptionalism. Specifically, 57% of Americans disagree with the statement “Success in life is pretty much determined by forces outside our control.” Notably, this is a considerably higher percentage than the global median of 38%. The report also found that Americans disagree with Western Europeans on opinions about the significance of religion. Half of Americans deem religion as very important in their lives, but less than a quarter in Spain (22%), Germany (21%), Britain (17%), and France (13%) share this same view. Are these differences rooted in a culture that believes it is superior? Is there a possible connection to the political and economic structure that rules the country? Yet, there have been changes showing that Americans are now “less likely to say that their culture is better than others; six-in-ten Americans held this belief in 2002, and 55% did so in 2007.” It appears that beliefs are changing regarding cultural superiority and diminishing among Americans across various demographic groups. Additional research shows that older Americans still believe (rather than younger age groups) that their culture is better than others. The following statistics detail this belief:

Six-in-ten Americans ages 50 or older share this view, while 34% disagree; those younger than 30 hold the opposite view, with just 37% saying American culture is superior and 61% saying it is not. Opinions are more divided among those ages 30 to 49; 44% in this group see American culture as superior and 50% do not (Pew Research Center, 2014).

Moreover, H.T. Reynolds from the University of Delaware states the following according to C.W. Mills:

Among the best known power-elite theorists, the governing in the United States draws its members from three areas: (1) the highest political leaders including the president and a handful of key cabinet members and close advisers; (2) major corporate owners and directors, and (3) high-ranking military officers. (Reynolds, 1998)

Looking at power and economics from an agricultural lens, Europe seems to lean toward an *ideologically united elite*. In other words, it is an ideology espoused by all or nearly all-elite persons. In European countries, it is not unusual to see signs that say “GMO Free Zone,” and while American farmers use technology to increase production and reduce the use of herbicides and pesticides, some groups in the US are using the European model to discourage retailers from marketing food produced with GMO seeds (Eustices, 2015).

DISCUSSION

The differences between Europeans and non-Europeans, namely Americans, have become more pronounced in the past generation. The main distinction lies in the concept of power between the perspectives by Europeans and Americans. Specifically, the efficacy of power, morality of power, and desirability of power is diverging. Europeans have been militarily weak since the end of World War II. World War II all but destroyed European nations as global powers, and their postwar inability to project sufficient force overseas to maintain colonial empires in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East forced them to retreat after their imperial dominance in these areas over several centuries. The distinction in the power was further compounded by the advent of the Cold War between the United States and the former Soviet Union. Europeans were in the middle of this struggle and were not able to exert much influence between the Soviet Union and the United States. The advent of the new Europe emerged with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 with the goal to have a united Europe to challenge the hegemony of the United States in terms of power (Kagan, 2002). Samuel P. Huntington from Harvard University predicted that the coalescing of the European Union would be “the single most important move” in a worldwide reaction against American hegemony and would produce a “truly multipolar” twenty-first century (Huntington, 1999).

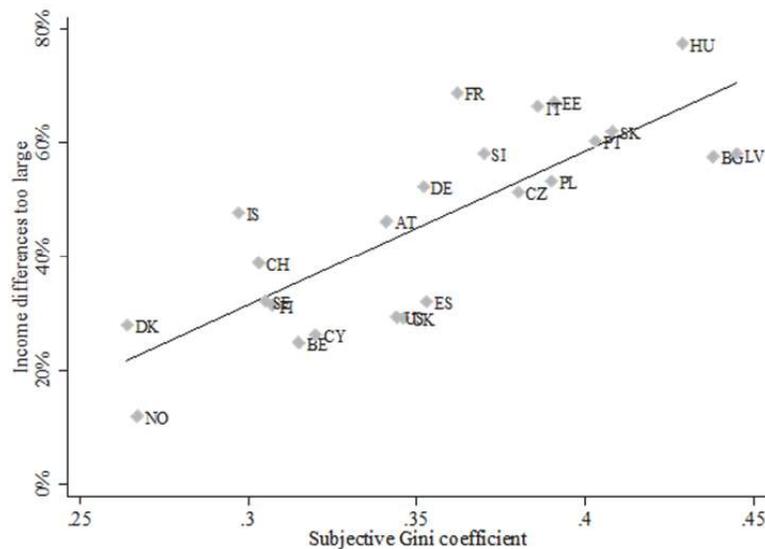
There are distinctions between the two worldviews and the use as well as the perception of power that besets the transatlantic relationship today. Both still have the same perspective about humanity, but there are vast differences in the use of power to influence the world stage. A clear understanding of these differences in the perception of power between these transatlantic nations will create a bond that can still aspire to help humanity.

It is estimated that we will grow from three to eight billion *connected* people, adding five billion new consumers into the global economy over the next five years. This represents tens of trillions of new dollars flowing into the global economy. And it is not going to happen the way it did 20 years ago with a 9,600 bps modem via AOL. In fact, these new consumers are coming online with a 1 Mbps connection and access to the world’s information on Google, cloud 3D printing, Amazon Web Services, artificial intelligence with Watson, and crowdsourcing, among others. Who will be the weak or the strong? How will we know and understand this new power that develops?

IDEAS FOR FUTURE DEBATES AND DISCUSSION

Prior studies in this area have not examined the distinctions for these differences in the application of power. While some of the causes for these distinctions in the differences in power are known, a greater understanding of these distinctions can be achieved by investigating the various regions in Europe concerning the use of power on the world stage. That is, not all nations in Europe will have the same perceptions because of the differences among European nations as attributed to the historical antecedents of each of these nations. A greater understanding of these disaggregated differences will allow researchers to recognize how these differences can be ameliorated to improve the relations between the two sides in this current transatlantic divide. And what about the different economic viewpoints?

Figure 1
Evaluation of Income Differences and Perceived Inequality



Source: Niehues (2014), based on ISSP 2009.

The residents of the European Union (EU) have a pessimistic view on income equality. In general, the EU views its society as a pyramid, but the income distribution in some of the European welfare states resembles an onion with some people at the bottom, the majority in the middle class, and a small portion of rich people at the top. In contrast to the EU, the United States reveals a completely different picture when it comes to income inequality. Though the income inequality in the United States has grown, citizens of the United States are more likely to believe that they live in a middle-class society than their EU counterparts. From these perceptions, it is not new to the United States, but it is new to the EU. In fact, the newly developed measure of (miss-) perceived inequality could explain up to two thirds of the cross-country differences in critical views on income differences (as shown in Figure 1), and 56 % of the variation in the income redistributive preferences.

Table 1
US Favorability Ratings
 (measured as a percent)

Country	1999/2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
France	62	62	42	37	43	39	39	42	75	73	75	69	64	75
Germany	78	60	45	38	42	37	30	31	64	63	62	52	53	51
Greece	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	35	39	34
Italy	76	70	60	--	--	--	53	--	--	--	--	74	76	78
Poland	86	79	--	--	62	--	61	68	67	74	70	69	67	73
Spain	50	--	38	--	41	23	34	33	58	61	64	58	62	60
United Kingdom	83	75	70	58	55	56	51	53	69	65	61	60	58	66

Source: Niehues (2014)

Table 1 shows the favorability estimates by various members of the EU towards the United States. The largest difference in the perceptions between EU and the United States is foreign policy. Perception has

been an up and down experience since 1999/2000. The median favorable views of the EU towards the US are 66% and do not include Russia and Ukraine. Building greater understanding is to provide policymakers with in-depth knowledge about countries. Dr. Robert Parks, CEMA director, stated, “Before the Arab Spring, there was a massive dearth of knowledge in the English-language literature about North Africa, particularly in Algeria. Now, interest in what’s happening in Algeria is growing, and policymakers often ask for and appreciate our expertise in giving them a general background about the region” (Davis, 2016).

Brandolini et al. (2013) perform a comparative analysis of financial hardship in five countries – France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the UK – through the self-reported perception of the housing cost burden. They use EU-SILC data for 2005 to 2010, inclusive. These perceptions show wide differences between Germany, France and the UK on the one hand, and Italy and Spain on the other. Among the former, age reveals the existence of life-cycle effects. However, the latter set of European countries show that GDP growth and higher consumer confidence contribute to reducing the probability of a high burden, whereas high levels of unemployment and inequality contribute to its increase.

Drawing a somewhat biased conclusion, when looking at the EU, one might ask if having joined a currency area is a drawback, and national governments losing a policy tool are thereby also losing the ability of adjusting exchange rates. This potentially effective policy instrument (should wage and price developments diverge), or, more generally, if one of the countries concerned is affected by an asymmetric shock, could be a topic for further discussions.

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