Narrating Europe: The EU's Ontological Security Dilemma

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Abstract

Identifying the narratives that social actors tell and use can provide us with some
insight into how they have understood the world around them, when and how they
should act and why. The argument about narratives and ontological security in the
EU will make three points when examining two European stories: the EU's
foundational narrative and that of united in diversity. First, ontological security is
generated through narratives, constructing an understanding of the social world
rooted in setting, characters and emplotment. Second, the EU's narratives are not
that different from those of national experiences. Third, and relatedly, narratives
that attempt to construct ontological security for the EU may increase insecurity in
other actors.

As the European Union recently faced a series of challenges, defined as "existential" by
Commission President Juncker in his State of the Union speech in 2016, political leaders and
commentators alike called for a "new narrative" for Europe. While it often is not entirely clear what
exactly they mean by narrative, the appeals share a common desire to have a story that links the
current travails of the Union to the past and provides a way to face a common future. It highlights
the centrality that narratives can play in defining how a political community views itself and the
kinds of normative and cognitive maps it uses to organize political and social life. The European
Union may be *sui generis* but it too needs stories to craft an autobiography, to help provide
ontological security. While member states could rely on national narratives to justify building

fences or challenging "Brussels", the EU scrambled to find a story that could make sense of the changing terrain in the wake of economic crisis, Russian intervention in Crimea, Brexit and having to address large numbers of migrants. The Barroso Commission even launched a year-long project to find this new narrative that would establish a "new Renaissance", identifying "a new, encompassing narrative" that would "articulate what Europe stands for today and tomorrow" (European Commission 2014). The initiative does not seem to have amounted to much but this does not necessarily mean that there are no narratives that might contribute to the confidence that the social world being crafted by the European project is constant and consistent.

The recent interest in narratives in the social sciences has helped establish that they are an essential part of the construction of a social self for both individuals and organisations (Hinchman and Hinchman 1997). They can be useful tools to examine how a political community defines who it is and whether there might be a widely shared understanding of the reasons why it came together and where it wants to go. The construction of the social self through narrative is also the way in which we can understand how actors generate ontological security. Ontological security argues that before actors decide what to do, they need to place themselves in a social world, define its boundaries in order to determine who will act and why. The EU may be *sui generis* but it faces these same challenges of establishing the constancy of being so that it can act and it must find, amongst others, the stories that will help provide this.

The article will argue three central points. First, ontological security is generated through narratives: that is, core elements of a narrative – setting, characters and emplotment – are the basis for providing a sense of self for social actors. The telling and re-telling of stories help provide the constancy for the development of cognitive and normative maps that guide their behaviour. The concern is with the extent to which the EU has narratives that give it constancy and agency. This is

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different from whether the EU has an identity, which can take on many different forms and is not necessarily essential for agency (Cram 2012). Second, the EU's narratives are not that distant from those that have defined the national experience. These are attempts to generate ontological security on the same terrain as states, both within and outside the EU. Third, narratives can also create an ontological security dilemma. Narratives that aim to reduce the uncertainty of the social world for some actors may be seen as a threat by others, thus leading them to craft stories that might increase uncertainty. Narratives aimed at generating basic trust and routinizing may increase uncertainty in others. The article will explore whether the EU's foundational and unity in diversity narratives reduce uncertainty and do create a self and/or, at the same time, become menacing for others. We will argue that this more than just a tension between narratives and counter-narratives as stories are crafted not necessarily to balance those of a perceived threat. Rather, they are aimed primarily at enhancing an internal sense of self that can result in increased ontological security for others.

The argument will be divided into three sections. The first will examine whether and how narratives might contribute to ontological security. It will also highlight how ontological security might be a useful instrument to understand how narratives work in making sense of the social world. The second section will look at the EU's foundational narrative and the normative map it tries to set out. This section will examine the extent to which the foundational story might be seen as a threat to that of others, leading to a sort of ontological security dilemma. It will use the example of the EU's recent relations with Russia to explore how each side may feel threatened by the other's narratives. It is not the aim of the article to argue that we do not need to take into consideration physical security and material capacity. It simply wants to explore where the same sort of dynamics that are at play in a security dilemma may apply when we are examining ontological security. The third section will look at the EU's narrative of unity in diversity and examining whether and how there may be an ontological security dilemma with the member states.

Narratives and the Ontological Security Dilemma

"Everybody loves a good story". This is a phrase that is heard in many languages and in many different contexts. Stories are the basis of human communication, social organization and the sustained sense of self (Schechtman 2007). As Roland Barthes argues, "[N] narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative" (Barthes 1977 [1966]:79). Barthes and others suggest that how we understand our social world comes through identifying setting, the characters who shape it and how and why events have meaning by structuring them. It is a way of presenting events that has two essential features: it has coherence in that it reveals how events, settings and characters are linked; and it illustrates the meaning that characters give to events and the context in which they take place (Goldie 2012:14-17). It is the assignation of meaning by characters but also narrators and readers that helps distinguish narrative from a mere recounting of events and helps illustrate how narratives construct meaning and shared understandings amongst social actors (Herman and Vervaeck 2005:13). This makes narratives social acts, involving a series of relations that define social spaces and borders, establishing who is included in a particular community and why (Eder 2006:257).

The recent narrative turn in the social sciences has provided a welcome contribution to interpretative and reflexive approaches to political outcomes and phenomena (Czarniawska 2004; Polletta et al. 2011). We do not mean to provide an extensive summary of narrative in the social sciences but we do want to highlight how it can be used and what might be the value added for understanding ontological security in the European Union. First, as Francesca Polletta argues,

narrative is much more useful than the related notions of rhetoric, frame, belief or even discourse in that it is much easier to identify (Polletta 2009:7). Narration involves what Hayden White referred to as emplotment, that is, looking for ways in which to create structure in what is seen or reported (Schechtman 1996; White 1973). The accounts have characters, usually a protagonist and an antagonist, as well as a setting (Bal 2009). Their success depends, in part, on the extent to which those who hear or read the stories recognise how they have been arranged (Goldie 2012). Second, as Alistair MacIntyre argues, narratives allow us to understand the intentions of actors within their social and historical context by placing them with a temporal and conceptual ordering (MacIntyre 2007 (1984):208). Central to stories is plot or their structure, which reveals the meaning that actors give to the events they have ordered (Polletta 2009:9). Identifying the narratives that social actors tell and use can provide us with some insight into how they have understood the world around them, when and how they should act (de Guevara 2016).

Narratives also can serve to provide ontological security for a polity; that is, practices, routines and narratives that help define who it is and why it remains as a political community (Mitzen 2006a; Steele 2008). Drawing from its use by Giddens and international relations scholars, ontological security refers to a sense of confidence of one's identity (Berenskoetter 2014; Giddens 1991; Mitzen 2006b). It is not the identity but the assurance that the social world that is legible and has a sense of permanence. It provides boundaries for social action and is found in social practices but also in how the social world is constructed through narratives (Delehanty and Steele 2009). Moreover, narratives are essential for a sense of self and its continuity (Goldie 2012:117). As Catarina Kinnvall argues, "[s]elf-identity consists of the development of a consistent feeling of biographical continuity where the individual is able to sustain a narrative about the self and answer questions about doing, acting and being" (Kinnvall 2006:30-31). This suggests that narratives construct meaning and understanding to why a community stays together, They are successful when

they emerge from a constant interaction between their production and consumption, affirming understandings that are culturally embedded in readers and transmitted by credible narrators (Herman and Vervaeck 2009:112).

Narratives and narration – that is, how actors "emplot" events, places and other actors - can be useful in that they have a number of elements that can establish cognitive and normative maps to make sense of the world (Auerbach 2009). Successful narratives can contribute to this sense of understanding the world in which political action takes place as they make the world understandable and legible. It is not the stories that are necessarily unambiguous but the meaning they are meant to impart and share through their interpretation allows the audience to make sense of what might seem as random events or forces (Bevir 2006; Bruner 1991; MacIntyre 2007 (1984); Polletta 2009).   As Subotic argues, "States, therefore, construct "autobiographical identity narratives" to make sense of their own behaviour in the international system, to give their actions meaning" (Subotić 2016). These narratives have consequences for the capacity of actors to act and the choices they make. Looking at how actors narrate parts of the social world can tell us something about the cognitive and normative maps that give them the security to act (Krebs 2015:813). The narrative construction of ontological security, then, is not the same as identity as the concern is with how social actors derive an understanding of their social world that allows them to act. It is how actors continue to experience themselves as whole and constant over time by crafting an autobiography that has coherence and meaningfulness.

The European Union also seeks ontological security. It may be the case that there may be a range of polities that can provide ontological security and that looking to the state as having a monopoly is historically contingent (Zarakol 2017). This implies that the EU can serve a number of functions but providing ontological security might not be one of them. However, as recent research has tried to

demonstrate, the EU also has a series of practices that tries to give meaning to the polity and why it has come together to govern a space and a community; moreover, this is part of a process that is necessary for the EU to act (McNamara 2015; Sternberg 2013). The EU has attempted to assume agency and in order to do so it increasingly is called to provide a sense of self that spells out in whose name it acts and why. It may not necessarily claim a monopoly as an ontological security provider but it does need to generate a degree of surety about the continuity of its sense of self when it tries to act. For instance, in facing the challenge of how to address questions about migration and borders, it needs to not only have an understanding of the physical organisation of territory but also one that gives meaning to those borders and who is to be excluded (Della Sala 2017).

The search for a European narrative has tried to capture the unique nature of the European Union but it has often adopted those that are very similar to those of national experiences. Manners and Murray have argued that there is no single narrative of the European Union and the European project but rather at least six stories have been crafted to give meaning to integration (Manners and Murray 2016). This broader canvas of the narration of the EU provides a useful insight into the dynamics of integration, including its contestation. It also highlights how the underlying narratives of the EU are not so different from those we find in most of the national experiences of its member states. For instance, narrating a global role or about how to balance state and market have been part of the national story for states in modern Europe. The polyphony of narratives is not necessarily an obstacle to ontological security; indeed a plurality may be a sign of its reliance and adaptability (Browning and Joenniemi 2017). However, as will see below, it is not the plurality of narratives that may be a challenge for ontological security in the EU but the extent to which they become reduced to consensus-making stories that appear threatening to other actors.

Narratives of the EU are not necessarily counter-narratives to those of the modern state, aiming simply to provide a sense of self on the basis of conventional tropes of governing. However, even when not directly presenting counter-narratives, these European stories, rather, seem to be competing on the same terrain and in doing so, may question the biographical continuity of other actors, be they other states or member states of the EU itself. Narratives do not take place in a vacuum and in the attempt to enhance ontological security they may pose a threat to that of others. Narratives and counter-narratives that may be aimed primarily at a domestic audience may lead to increasing mutual ontological *insecurity* (Lupovici 2012). What may emerge is a sort of security dilemma, where the search for (ontological) security is rooted in narratives that are perceived as threats by others.

The EU's Foundational Narrative in the Neighbourhood

As the series of crises or challenges that were part of the EU's political agenda began to accumulate in the 2010s, both political commentators and political leaders spoke of an "existential" crisis. What they were referring to, and central to the discussion of the narrative and ontological security, is the questions that were raised about the EU's "progressive" narrative (Gilbert 2008). This refers to an understanding of the European project as a trajectory that would lead actors to look to deeper and wider integration as the response to events that upset an equilibrium. Economic crisis, Russia's occupation of Crimea, migrants and Brexit all questioned the emplotment of events of the previous fifty years, which saw further integration as the plot that held them all together. The EU's "need to experience itself as a whole", as Mitzen describes ontological security (Mitzen 2006b:342) had been very much tied to a foundational story that recent events have challenged.

As in the case of states, the EU has a foundational narrative.[1] How the foundational moment is understood can provide us with insight into the cognitive and normative maps actors use to define what needs to be done and when, as well as who is to act and in reference to whom. Foundational narratives "explain the present in terms of a creative act that took place in the past" (Tudor 1972:91). They seek to provide a story that places the political community within an arc of history and political development, providing it with a defining moment when it realised its destiny to change history. As in classical mythology, the hidden or guiding hand of destiny that led to the creation of the nation and the state is often present. Foundational narratives tend to highlight the emergence of political order from "Chaos", the mythical darkness, and to put an end to it, weaving tales that link the founding moment with a broader universal category that is more inclusive for later generations. Foundational narratives are not only cosmogenic, they are also eschatological; that is, the birth of the new signals the end of something else (Tudor 1972). The foundational narrative of the birth of the union is almost always told in relation to the "decline" of the state and nation in the international system. Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi's *Pan-Europa* described a Europe of declining states and warring nations that could only be rescued by some form of European union. If it did not learn the lessons of history it would "share the history of the Holy Roman Empire" (Coudenhouve-Kalergi 1923:23-26). Nearly ninety years later, John McCormick gave a name to the belief that the decline of the state and nation were giving birth to a new order, "Europeanism". He argued,

Europeanism has meant not just the retreat of the state and the weakening links between authority and the state, but also new approaches to understanding the nation, citizenship, and patriotism, driven by the cosmopolitan ideas that all human beings belong to a single moral community that transcends state boundaries or national identities (McCormick 2010:67).

There is near consensus regarding the story of how the original member states of the EU emerged from the ashes of the war to renounce nationalism as a basis for governing and for relations between states. It is replete with heroic figures such as Konrad Adenauer, Alcide De Gasperi and Winston Churchill (Kølvraa and Ifversen 2011; Réveillard 1998). Even bureaucrats such as Jean Monnet assume a mythical status in the tale of the birth of the EU and in its evolution (Cohen 2007; Joly 2007). Its basic premise is that nationalism brought the continent to the point of ruin in the twentieth century but it was in its darkest moment that the vision for a new order took root. The rise of fascism and the destruction of war were seen as the death knell of political power entrusted and enshrined in the sovereign nation state, with hard borders defining a territory and its population. We see a clear narrative structure in this morality tale that presents the reasons and the basis for the post-war construction of the EU. It rejects or is agnostic about material power as the basis for organising political communities and governing. It also is agnostic about the territory as providing the basis for routines and practices that could provide ontological security for a political community.

How the EU and Russia interact has much to do with how they view each other as much as it does with shared or conflicting interests (Bechev 2015). As Tom Casier argues, "the EU acts on the basis of what it believes Russia has become. The Union and its member states redefine the identity of Russia, aggrandise differences between perceived 'European' and Russian identities and eventually – in a context of rather acrimonious relations – read bad intentions into Russia's behaviour. Something similar happens the other way around. Russia is primarily led by the images it holds of the EU" (Casier 2016:13). The EU clearly identifies with its "foundational" values rooted in liberal democracy and has constructed a narrative about its birth that sees its formation as the conclusion of the crisis caused by nationalism and the opening chapter of a new narrative of political belonging, territory and sovereignty.

This clash of narratives came to a head in the Ukraine. The protestors in Maidan Square were seen as re-telling the story of the EU's creation. As President Commission claimed, "Those young people in the streets of Ukraine, with freezing temperatures, are writing the new narrative for Europe" (Barroso 2014:325). The EU as the beacon for political communities seeking democracy and prosperity was still seen to be a powerful story not only for the protestors but also for citizens of the EU member states. The peaceful means used by the protestors was contrasted to the strong-armed tactics of the "other", the incumbent Ukrainian government and its Russian ally, by EU officials such as High Representative Catherine Ashton, who descended on to Maidan Square to help write the integration story. In a speech in Poland a few months later, Barroso claimed that,

"Let reason prevail over force" or "Let wisdom prevail over power" could have been indeed the motto of the European Union. A Union built on shared values: peace, democracy, respect of human dignity, and I mean the respect of every man, woman and child, tolerance and justice. It has been since the very beginning the guiding principle of the European integration process. A process built on free consent…Enlargement, or what I prefer to call it: reunification of Europe, has been a key element of the project of a united, free, democratic continent at peace. It also makes Europe more prosperous…That is why our European firm commitment must be now to let reason prevail over the reawakening of the old demons – the demons of populism, protectionism, extreme nationalism, xenophobia. (Barroso 2014:350).

Barroso is repeating the EU narrative that the expression of material power is not part of the integration biography and that reuniting a community of values was what brought EU officials to Maidan Square, not the desire to extend its material power over a political space. Importantly, it is a

story that is told for internal consumption more than to convince others, especially in the face of the recent challenges faced by the EU.

Other actors, however, do not understand the EU's foundational narrative in the same way. Russia, for instance, read this story of a benign power simply as extending universal values differently. Even before the intervention in the Ukraine, the EU's post-modern, post-sovereign and post-national trope clashed with Russia's own foundational story of a "traditional" society in a modern world that straddled the boundaries between a traditional east and a secular, modern west. EU criticism of Russia's anti-LGBT legislation or of individual cases of rights violations, such as the imprisonment of the members of Pussy Riot, served the Putin regime's narrative of the West trying to impose a social model on its neighbours. Russian officials also reacted to seemingly innocuous events such as the Eurovision song contest victory by a bearded drag artist in 2014. While the winner said the message for Putin was; "I really felt like tonight, Europe showed that we are a unity full of respect and tolerance", the Russian deputy prime minister, Dmitry Rogozin, responded that the result, "showed supporters of European integration their European future – a bearded girl" (Pop 2014). The EU's emphasis on liberal values such as rule of law and tolerance also fed into a broader social movement, crystallised around the notion of Eurasianism and the figure of Aleksandr Dugin, that identified liberalism as the greatest threat to Russia and the foundational values of Russian society (Ostbo 2016). It is not simply a case of each side having to construct an "other" to sustain a regime or policies; it was that each side had a foundational story that threatened the other.

Crises and the United in Diversity Narrative

"United in diversity" is the official motto of the EU since 2000 and according to the European Commission website, "It signifies how Europeans have come together, in the form of the EU, to work for peace and prosperity, while at the same time being enriched by the continent's many different cultures, traditions and languages."[2] The Preamble to the Treaty of Lisbon recalls the importance of healing the division of the continent and for reconstruction to take place by strengthening solidarity amongst the different peoples and cultures of Europe. It also goes on to say that the signatories were resolved to enhance the convergence of their economies. As with the foundational narrative, tensions arise when the actors emphasise (national) differences, whether they be cultural, economic or political: it is in the crafting of the Union that the divisions of the "continent" fade into the background. The 2017 White Paper on the Future of Europe may have got the motto slightly wrong but it too warned about the false allure of isolation.

> Following the motto of "unity in diversity", the EU and its Member States have been able to draw on the unique strengths and richness of their nations to achieve unprecedented progress. In an uncertain world, the allure of isolation may be tempting to some, but the consequences of division and fragmentation would be far-reaching. It would expose European countries and citizens to the spectre of their divided past and make them prey to the interests of stronger powers (European Commission 2017c:26).

The narrative claims that the EU is greater than the sum of its parts but that the parts can only exploit their strengths if they are engaged in the process of constructing Europe, as evidenced by their divided past. In the integration narrative, diversity that is not part of a process of unification is sure to sow division and conflict.

United in diversity – while not unique to the EU as it is found not only in multinational federations such as Switzerland and Canada but is also part of the narrative of some of the EU's member states - meant to highlight the unique form of governing in Europe, one that did not seek out to impose a single political or cultural identity as nationalism was supposedly wont to do. Using a language about civilisations that rings strange in 2017, the 1973 Council Declaration on a European Identity claimed that the existing members of the then Community, "might have been pushed towards disunity by their history and by selfishly defending misjudged interests. But they have overcome their past enmities and have decided that unity is a basic European necessity to ensure the survival of the civilization which they have in common." Central to the declaration on identity is that the fledgling union's sense of self was a narrative arc that saw the cohesion of Europe torn asunder by "misjudged" interests. Diversity still reigned in Europe but it masked a much deeper well of shared values and interests that would be the root of peace and prosperity. National and cultural differences were not seen as disruptive when subsumed by the propulsive forces of unity. Jean-Claude Juncker returned to this theme in 2017 in commenting on Brexit, saying that the British had showed great courage and had given much to Europe when its basic values were threatened during World War II. However, he claimed that, "later their strength waned. When they were called to vote in the referendum, they were not the people they had once been" (European Commission 2017b). The British had not only stopped being European, they no longer had the qualities that made them courageous in the past.

Juncker's statement highlights how the United in Diversity narrative is trying to find a find line between forging a sense of self that underscores shared values and common values that does not upend national differences and does put into question the ontological security of the state. Commission President Barroso returned to this theme when presenting the "New Narrative for Europe". Arguing that Europe was necessarily "cosmopolitan", he stated that, "We are not creating

an identity against other identities, a counter-identity, the identities of chauvinistic people" (Barroso 2014:324). Like Juncker, he was trying to craft a sense of self that did not seek a monopoly of political and cultural identity but allowed for a synergy. However, he was keen to point out that identities that sought to be "counter-identities" harked back to an exclusive sense of belonging that left little room for diversity. Moreover, in another speech, he emphasised how it was this promotion of diversity as part of a unifying process that would help the EU engage with the rest of the world as well as ensure the continued successful functioning of the social market economy (Barroso 2014:127-130). A sense of self that was rooted in solidarity across borders was an important part of the unity in diversity narrative.

The United in Diversity narrative has always faced challenges in creating biographic surety for the EU and even more so in the face of recent crises. First, while it always sought to strike a balance between tracing a common narrative arc and extolling the virtues of maintaining diversity, this contrasted with the strong pressures generated by the single market and a single currency to have greater policy and political convergence. The same preamble to the Treaty of Lisbon that highlighted how united in diversity were central to defining the integration project also called for greater convergence of economies as well as the establishment of a common foreign policy. In what became known as *The Five Presidents Report*, the major institutional leaders claimed that economic and monetary union was a half-built house that needed to reinforce the commitments to common policy objectives and strengthen common institutions of macroeconomic governance (Juncker 2015). The word diversity does not appear once in the 24-page document whereas "common" appears 29 times, often as an adjective to describe different governing features and convergence 28 times.

The convergence narrative, so much part of the economic narrative highlighted in Manners and Murray, is difficult to reconcile with the story of a Union of unity and diversity. Calling for deeper integration of labour markets or creating common debt instruments may be essential for the efficient functioning of markets or reducing financial instability but they tell a story of a house that is being built with a single blueprint. Moreover, the long process of addressing Greece's public finances brought out how little diversity would be available for the single currency to work (Ryner 2015). Convergence also highlights that the unity narrative has not entirely integrated into its story a widely held understanding of what it means to be "European" in a united EU. For instance, many national leaders caught between increasing domestic pressure to take a more sceptical position on Europe and a commitment to the integration project have come out against "this Europe", referring to one that supposedly is only concerned with having the rules of Fiscal Compact observed (Brunazzo and Della Sala 2016).

A second challenge for the United in Diversity narrative to provide ontological security for the EU is that it necessarily is competing with national narratives and national story-tellers, who may see unity as a threat to the ontological security of member states. Political leaders at the national level were ready to invoke past historical differences either to accuse some member states of shirking commitments or to remind others of their role in a darker past as a way to resist having their own policy autonomy restricted (Bickes, Otten and Weymann 2014). Interpretations of the crisis and its possible resolution resorted to national narratives and national leaders often presented solutions at the European level as part of the struggle between national economic and social models trying to assert themselves on other member states or, even if it was a "European" solution, it was something that was a threat to national distinctiveness (Matthijs and McNamara 2015). Barroso betrayed his frustration of how national story-tellers only crafted narratives of diversity, leaving European institutions to make the case for unity. He claimed, "My vision of Europe is not one where only

European institutions promote unity and Member States defend diversity. A real partnership is where European Institutions respect diversity and national governments promote unity" (Barroso 2014:120). Barroso is highlighting the tendency of national leaders to shift blame for unpopular decisions to the European level, often glossing over their role in those same decisions. However, it is also true that on a range of recent issues, some member states have felt that European policies and commitments put into question their distinct approach to questions such as macroeconomic policy and migration policy. The Visigrad Group has been at the forefront of efforts to have migration policy driven by the distinct and different conditions within member states, calling for a "policy framework should take into account situation in particular Member States, including their difficulties and constraints as well as their capabilities and available resources" (Visigrad Group 2016).

The migration crisis has highlighted the strains that the United in Diversity narrative faces when trying to provide a sense of biographic continuity to the integration project (Della Sala 2017). Attempts to narrate the crisis as "European" met resistance not only because the diversity of member states meant that they were affected differently by the question; but also because some member states felt their diversity threatened by a European solution that resulting in their acceptance of a number of refugees that they had not agreed to. Every attempt to craft the migration crisis as part of the united in diversity narrative – with attendant notions of solidarity – was seen by some member states as a challenge to their own ontological security. Governments in Hungary and Poland have been able to enhance their own position by narrating the refugee crisis as a challenge to the internal unity of their political community. The reply at the European level has been to go back to the notion that this sort of narrative of national diversity that needs to be protected is a return to the division of the past that brought conflict and instability.

The EU's reaction to challenges to existing borders of states is another instance of how the unity in diversity narrative can create on ontological security dilemma. In this instance, however, it is recognition of the dilemma that has created ontological insecurity. Addressing the issue of how to respond to secessionist movements has raised questions about a central value of the integration project: that borders cannot be changed unilaterally. In the 1990s, this was not seen as a problem as the issue arose outside of the EU, especially in the Balkans. It was possible to reconcile the desire for sovereignty from some regions with the unity in diversity narrative. For instance, in a speech praising the diversity of the EU's member states, Commission President Prodi commented:

> Recent events in Kosovo demonstrate clearly how precarious the situation is there. There is no room for complacency. Peace is a fragile plant that calls for constant care and nurturing. There will be no lasting solution in the Balkans if we do not offer the countries in the region realistic prospects of joining the European Union. This has worked with other countries in the past. And it will work in Kosovo too. The Union makes borders less meaningful, so being a minority within a single Member State is less of a problem. In our Union, everyone is -- in a sense -- in a minority. And in our Union, no state can lord it over the others (Prodi 2004).

Prodi's speech was in Belfast and he emphasised how it was the tolerance of diversity within an integrated Europe that allowed for an eventual resolution to the Irish question.

Prodi's narrative of connecting diversity to the dismantling of borders generated by European integration, thus leading to support for sovereignty movements in Kosovo, contrasts with the

lukewarm position taken by the Commission first with respect to the Scottish referendum on independence in September 2014 and then Catalonia's unilateral declaration of secession in October 2017. For instance, Commission President Juncker in a speech in Salamanca reiterated the basic tenets of the foundational narrative, highlighting how Spain was a prime example of the transformative power of the European Union, enabling member states to develop into consolidated liberal democracy. Attentive to the delicate question of the Catalonian declaration, he stated, "We do not have the right to undo at the national and regional level the model of coexistence that we have been able to build for the whole of Europe; if we do, we will all drift away" (European Commission 2017a). He went on to praise the unity of the member states, while also claiming that nationalism was a poison that prevented Europe from responding to the challenges facing the EU. Juncker and other Commission officials have reservations about regional movements, saying that accepting diversity at this level would leave to an unworkable Union of 95 members (Boffey and Jones 2017). EU officials did not want to extend the argument used in the Balkans to European regions, as this would threaten narratives of national unity and borders within member states.

Conclusions

It is not a surprise that there have been numerous references in recent years to an "existential" crisis of the EU. Nor is it a surprise that the search for a "new narrative for Europe" has not produced a compelling account that can make sense of the crises and their solution as "European" (Kaiser 2015). These two developments are closely related, as the "existential" crisis is really one of ontological insecurity. Narratives provide the biographic continuity that political communities need to feel ontologically secure. In telling and re-telling stories, a political community reflects and establishes a shared understanding of who it is and why it is staying together. The EU may not seek

to have a monopoly as an ontological security provider but it does need its own narratives in the face of numerous challenges to a shared meaning given to central values and experiences. Narratives are successful not simply because they convey content that is widely shared but because they are useful normative and cognitive maps that political communities can use to decide to act, why and in whose name.

The discussion of narratives in the European Union has highlighted at least three challenges that the EU faces with respect to ontological security. First, the EU relies on some of the same types of narratives that its member states have used to define who they are, why a diverse political community has come together to govern and how it will act. It may be a unique form of governing but these basic elements that contribute to a sense of self for the EU have also been there in national experiences. The result is that the narratives may be meaningful for some of the characters and even the narrator but not necessarily for the audience, which finds it in national stories. Second, and related, narratives of the integration project are competing with national narratives. Stories that are meant to enhance the biographic continuity of the EU often challenge the ontological security of third parties, such as the case of Russia, or the member states themselves. The EU does not deliberately seek out a counter-narrative to the nation state and to the experiences of its member states. However, states could perceive stories of unity and diversity or the "nobel/noble" narrative of peace and prosperity through integration as a challenge to their own biographic continuity. Third, who tells stories are important for enhancing ontological security. A successful narrative requires narrators that are seen as credible and reliable. There has yet to emerge a European story that is crafted, narrated and widely understood without it being filtered through a national lens. The success of the foundational narrative is largely rooted in its representation as national stories of reconciliation and reconstruction. Barroso's lament that national leaders only tell the story of diversity and how unity means something being imposed from the outside may be justified.

However, national leaders tell national stories and their success depends on the extent to which they can continue to craft those stories. The foundational narrative has had some success in contributing to a sense of self for the EU but that is partly due to its expropriation as part of the national story of some of the member states. The narrative of a polity that has become united because of, not despite, its diversity has not been able to become a normative and cognitive map for Europeans. National leaders see the ontological security of the state rooted in diversity and this is the story they tell. Looking at the role that narratives have played in constructing confidence in the continued sense of self as whole, as well as the challenges they face, may give us some insight into whether and how the many stories of integration may provide cognitive and useful maps to governing in the Union.

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Notes

[1] Limitations of space prevent us from distinguishing narratives from myths.
[2] https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/motto_en