

# HOMER

Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence



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## WELCOME

Dear reader,

The HOMER-project is entering its final stage. After three seminars bringing together students from Maastricht and Cologne and after interdisciplinary studies on memories of the European Union, combining history and political science in their analysis, it is the high to sum up some of the results. Over the course of the entire project, it became apparent

that history is always a critical discourse on the past: a reconstitution of elapsed facts and events seeking their contextualization and interpretation. Memory can be considered an ensemble of individual and collective recollections of the past. Narratives are hegemonic ways of recounting the past, remembering it and specific events. The three seminars and the three Brussels workshops have helped at developing an innovative approach to analysing and discussing EU master narratives. This 11th newsletter of the HOMER project provides an over-

view on these approaches to narratives of European Integration based on academic articles published recently by the project team and the advisory board.

On behalf of the HOMER team  
Jürgen Mittag

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## NARRATIVES ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

### THE EMERGE OF NARRATIVES

While the academic practice on European integration has traditionally focused on motives when interpreting its history, utilizing and analyzing narratives has become popular in recent years of academic inquiry. On the basic level, a narrative is “a set of

signs, which may involve writing, verbal or other sounds, or visual, acted, built or made elements that similarly convey meaning.” (Squire et al. 2015, p. 5) The concept has thus been applied to the study and discussion of narratives on European integration in

general, narratives on European Summits and to the study of four key moments in EU history with a focus on the respective media representation of the events.

### NARRATIVES ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

There are several main narratives which can be identified when investigating European integration. Culminating in the award of the Nobel Peace Prize 2012, the narrative of the EU as a peace community has been stressed as the main narrative on European integration. However, it must also be acknowledged that in recent years – and increasingly after the award in 2012 – this narrative on its own is no longer considered sufficient by both EU politicians and critics alike. Consequently, the European Commission launched a series of dialogues under the motto: “A new narrative for Europe”. Since then no one single narrative is predominating, but rather a plurality of complementary and opposing narratives exists. In this, a very prominent topic is the relationship between the European Union and its citizens. Against the backdrop of an uttered democratic deficit of the EU, the European institutions proclaimed the People’s Europe.

As it was brought forth by the institutions themselves, the top-down

nature of this narrative also caused some criticism with regards to its validity and still cannot serve as a full remedy to the openly articulated skepticism towards European integration.

Another narrative established in the 21st century is that of the EU as regulating force in global politics. The concept of regulating force describes those states or alliances which claim the status of a superpower due to immense military, security and economic resources. While this status was not ascribed to the European Union in the 20th century, the increasing presence and representation of the

status in which the EU represents the voices of its members collectively. Thus, stories about the EU also comprise the international dimension, even when this regulating force narrative is much contested.

Pioneer academic work of the 1950s and 60s includes studies aiming at the development of a European consciousness and image. With the revival of culturally inspired studies in the last decades, this research has become relevant again. In addition to the political-institutional endeavor that European integration most commonly is linked to in interpretations, the united Europe is seen as a cultural project which mirrors identities, mentalities and experiences. Of great importance in this regard is the question of a common “European identity” which serves as the basis for historic similarities and differences among European countries. The establishment of this narrative was also supported by the EU institutions which funded research into the topic in order to foster the

development of a common identity. At the same time, popular areas of



Union in numerous global conferences and organizations has led to a

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life fall in the same category and follow the same logic, e.g. football with its Champions League and European Championships or the Eurovision Song Contest that all show large mobilization potential. This potential is largely reiterated by the institutions of the EU which aim at capitalizing on it by, for example, making use of sport as a tool of public diplomacy.

The narrative of Europe as a crisis community has its historical roots in the 1970s when the empty chair crisis and issues in agriculture and household politics shaped the perception of the EU. Recent years see a renaissance of pessimism towards

Europe. The narrative is grounded on the assumption that the most powerful forces in the integration process also were the setbacks that the Union faced. Without the occurrence of crisis-like symptoms, much progress could not have happened in a way in which it did. The statement that the EC/EU is going through rough times in the current century has been articulated so prominently that the narrative has become a constant companion to European integration. Brexit marks the latest climax in this crisis narrative.

Much debate among historians arises over the issue whether the EU is

a community *sui generis*. Almost all of the mentioned narratives apply a dialectic cleavage between national and European level politics. The relationship between national sovereignty and transnational structures of the EU is very complex and is still not fully defined. This openness was and is subject to significant changes and makes the EU hard to grasp. As a consequence, both academia and public discourse conceptualize the Union as a construct *sui generis* that lacks proper comparative set-ups, structures and processes which also inevitably causes some degree of uncertainty when describing it.

## EUROPEAN SUMMITS NARRATIVES

Deepening the understanding of the EU through narrative research, the lens can also put on when analyzing European summits. Summits of Heads of State and Heads of Government have been decisive turning points in the process of European integration and produce widely ranging narratives by themselves. However, there is always more than one narrative to be taken into consideration when interpreting summits of the EEC/EU, this can perfectly be observed in the three examples of

The Hague 1969, Maastricht 1991 and Lisbon 2007.

As for The Hague, the summit in 1969 can (1) constitute the re-launch of integration, when looking back to the 1960s and, at the same time, the start into a second generation of integration, unbroken until today. The conflicting narrative is that The Hague is (2) the attempt of a re-launch, which

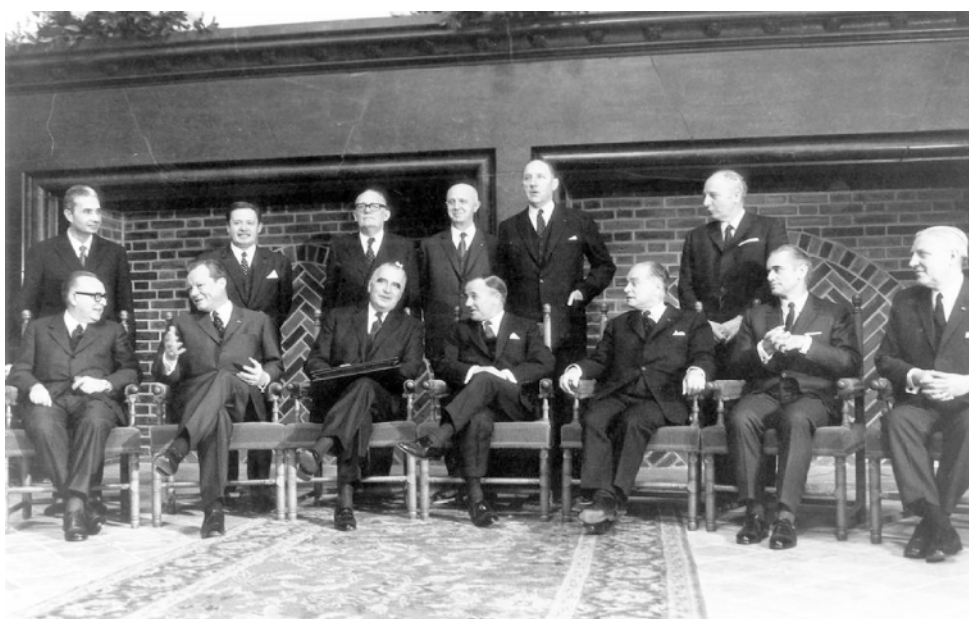
of the summit is strongly linked to the time which one grounds the event in, i.e. the then-past (1960s) or the then-future (1970s). Whatever narrative is taken, however, the overall characteristic of this summit was its impact on the course of European integration – that is the focus of both conflicting narratives.

Reconstructing different narratives becomes even more sophisticated when dealing with Maastricht 1991. Here, the two opposing narratives are rooted in very different events and streams of history:

(1): “Maastricht was the logical

failed around 1973, due to the Crisis of the 70s. It becomes clear that the nature and interpretation

(spill-over) project after the implementation of the Common Market, after the SEA – its core policy



project, Monetary Union, succeeded to the SEA and was successfully implemented in 1999." This narrative builds on the already established Common Market and sees the Maastricht summit with its result as a logical consequence of the successes of the common market, as it paved the way to the Monetary Union.

(2) "Maastricht was the first and decisive reaction of the European Communities to the end of the Iron Curtain and prepared Europe for continent-wide re-unification (with leftovers until Nice), with special attention to the German question." This narrative builds on larger political events outside the realm of mere EU politics. Due to the changes in the global political landscape, the members of the European Union needed to react, resulting in Maastricht 1991.

The focus of the conflict between these two narratives is about the opposition between the internal integration logic – "spill-over" –

vs. European integration driven by external factors in the field of international relations.

Two opposing narratives also exist for the last summit which had turning point character – Lisbon 2007:

(1): "The Lisbon Treaty is the Constitutional Treaty in disguise, an arrangement in order to avoid a second referendum in France and the Netherlands on the same legal/constitutional substance." This narrative is often used by critics of the initial Constitutional Treaty but also the institutions themselves construct the narrative when stressing that the wording of the Treaty will not use the term "constitution" to make clear its distinctness from the original Constitutional Treaty.

(2): "The Lisbon Treaty is the successor treaty to the dissatisfying Nice Treaty, modifying and reforming that treaty in fields, which are crucial for the functioning

of an enlarged Union." Here the function and its content in relation to the status quo take central role in interpreting the Treaty.

The main point in these two narratives is the conflicting interpretation of the systematic, not historical, meaning of the Lisbon Treaty, with regard to statehood, sovereignty, Europe, and so on.

From the selected examples it becomes clear that narratives depend on factors taken into account (politics, economy, society ...), the connection with other historical facts and on the scope of the story (short, medium, long run). It is, however, open and requires more analysis whether narratives depend on normative assumptions, which might be indicated by the last exemplary summit and the narrative on the Lisbon Treaty.

## NEWS EVENTS NARRATIVES

Conceptually, narratives on European integration can be distinguished in commemorative narratives emphasizing the commemoration of the particular issue in its own right and political narratives that primarily focus on the event's structural impact on European integration. Analyzing newspaper coverage of French, (West) German, Dutch and British papers, an assessment of narratives surrounding four key moments of EU history (Schuman Declaration, 1950; Treaties of Rome, 1958; The Hague summit, 1969, Maastricht Treaty, 1993) the narratives of the events

can be identified and assessed. With regards to quantitative representation of the events over the entire period, it becomes clear that the older events receive more attention in the media, which is of no surprise seeing the fact that these events simply occurred earlier. In general, press coverage on the events has been remarkably stable over the last six decades.

With regards to the dominant narratives taken for each event, the picture of the Treaties of Rome is mixed with articles evoking a commemorative and others the politi-

cal narrative. The commemorative dimension which mostly occurs in anniversary writings on the history of the event and its causes plays a much smaller role in the texts on the Maastricht Treaty. Articles on the Maastricht Treaty tend to refer to the criteria of the Economic and Monetary Union and the readiness or capability of member states to adhere to them. The narrative that "Maastricht" mainly means a legal text, not a historical incidence predominates.

In contrast, the Schuman Declaration is largely commemorated by



the media as a historic event, e.g. as “la déclaration révolutionnaire”. Prominent people like Jean Monet and Schuman himself shape the image on the event that the news is producing. The Hague summit attracted by far the least media attention, and here the narrative of the press was mainly political. Important to add is the institutions role in fostering the commemorative narrative of especially the Rome Treaties: Anniversaries

of the signing have often served as dates for future top-level meetings and so created their own commemorative tradition. The enactment of Rome as the birthday of European integration is consequently taken up by journalists on a regular basis. For the Schuman Declaration, too, official

commemoration by EC/EU institutions plays a prominent role. One result of the early endeavors is the institutionalized Europe Day on May, 9th which is officially declared in the context of the Lisbon Treaty.

## The Maastricht Treaty 1992 and the illustration of cartoons in diverse member states



HOMER Project 2015/2016: Maastricht Treaty 1992  
3rd session, Maastricht February 5th

## CONCLUSIONS ON NARRATIVES ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The research of the project contributes to the knowledge about narratives on European integration in different ways. First off, an overview of the different general narratives of European integration and its history provides a valuable addition to the dominant analysis of motives of the same process. Taken together, motives and narratives provide a fuller understanding of what the EU was and is and path the way for future research.

Two examples of such research have been conducted and provide valuable insight into the history and present of narratives on the EU. While no single event is linked to one single narrative, the opposing narratives on EU summits all circle around central characteristics but take into account different factors and connections to history. What becomes clear from studying media reports on key moments of European integration is that a

commemorative narrative can be created by institutions; however, this seems to be limited to the commemorative nature of anniversaries and Treaties and does not apply to general narratives, as can be seen with the People’s Europe narrative.

### Selected Literature

[Kiran Klaus Patel/Alexandros Sianos/Sophie Vanhoonacker](#): Does the EU Have a Past? Narratives of European Integration History and the Union’s Public Awareness Deficit, in: *Journal of European Integration History*. Jahrgang 24 (1), S. 143-166.

[Jürgen Mittag](#): Europeanarrative zwischen Friedensgemeinschaft und Krisendiagnose: „Traditionelle“ und „neue“ Erzählungen zur Geschichte der europäischen Integration, in: Ulrike Kurth/Jutta Mers (Hg.): *Der europäische Einigungsprozess: Nachbarschaft – Partnerschaft – Gemeinschaft?*

(Reihe Bildungsprojekt Europa), Bielefeld 2018, S. 65-87.

[Jürgen Mittag](#): Triebkräfte der Gemeinschaftsbildung: Motive und Narrative der europäischen Einigung, in Peter Becker/Barbara Lippert (Hg.): *Handbuch Europa*, Wiesbaden 2019 (im Erscheinen).

For further information see: