

The Political Bond in Europe

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The Political Bond in Europe. A Research Agenda

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Abstract

The normative foundations required by the EU have been cast variously in the literature in terms of an economic, social, constitutional or cultural bond. This essay proposes a shift in focus to what may be called the *political* bond, understood as people's sense of sharing in each other's predicaments and fate. Although rarely discussing it explicitly, existing approaches generally imply that this bond is uniform across issue-areas. Some of the basic insights of political psychology suggest that this may be an unsustainable assumption, and research will be needed to investigate whether populations perceive the political bond more widely in some issue domains than others, a finding which would have implications for institutional design.

Normative Foundations for a Disputed Polity

The need to engage ordinary citizens in the workings of the EU was not widely insisted upon for much of the Community's development. Early theorists of the integration process candidly focused on elites: 'it is as impracticable as it is unnecessary,' suggested Ernst Haas, 'to have recourse to general public opinion.' (Haas 1958: 16). What was important was the creation of an economic bond between professionals, through the functional integration of technical tasks (Monnet 1963). For most commentators, European integration was framed by a 'permissive consensus' amongst the wider populations – an euphemistic concept whose overtones of sober reflection were somewhat disingenuous and certainly little tested. Only in the early 1990s, largely as a result of changes made in the Maastricht Treaty,¹ did the popular dimension become a serious one in EU scholarship.

Little agreement has emerged in that time, however, regarding the bonds between citizens necessary for the EU to achieve the political consent that it needs. The economic bond implied by functional integration is today generally considered too thin a basis for a Union whose tasks extend well beyond the economic. At least three alternative approaches can be found in the literature, focusing variously on what can be termed the 'social bond', the 'bond of constitutional patriotism' and the 'cultural bond'.

The first of these is most associated with the work of Claus Offe, who argues that underlying any viable polity there must be the 'indispensable civic infrastructure' of 'trust' and 'solidarity' between citizens – trust understood as the belief that other citizens will undertake their civic duties, solidarity as the willingness to comply in situations where others and not oneself are the beneficiaries (Offe 2000: 4-5).² Neither belief, Offe emphasises, can be created from above by formal design: 'before citizens can recognise the authority of the state, they must first mutually recognise each other as being motivated by – and hence reciprocally worthy of – trust and solidarity' (Offe 2000: 5). The state can do no more than develop what already exists. Offe has suggested that an 'idea of liberation'

may be required to generate the sense of unity between people under which trust and solidarity can flourish, 'be it liberation from the rule of oppressive or exploitative foreign ... powers or liberation from princely particularism, arbitrariness, unjust oppression, and belligerent passions. ... Europe,' he believes, 'does not hold the promise of liberation.' The EU, one therefore concludes, cannot by itself create a 'European demos' (Offe 2003: 76).

Jürgen Habermas, foremost amongst those associated with the 'constitutional patriotist' approach,³ shares the same basic concern as Offe but adopts a more activist stance. 'Social solidarity,' he writes, 'has hitherto been limited to the nation-state; it must be widened to embrace all citizens of the EU.' Crucially, he sees this as a process that can be furthered by legal structures: 'peoples come into being ... only with their state constitutions' (Habermas 2002: 230).⁴ An EU Constitution would, he believes, have a 'catalytic effect' on the creation of EU-wide social solidarity (Habermas 2001a: 13): it would give tangible form to a 'political culture' which the peoples of Europe already share in their common traditions of civic rights and democratic participation.⁵ Popular recognition of these basic affinities, in the form of allegiance to a constitution, is taken as constituting a bond between peoples sufficient to negate any differences of a cultural kind.

Such shared values are likely, of course, to be rather general in character and not limited to the populations that they claim to bind. As one critic David Miller writes, 'subscribing to them marks you out as a liberal rather than a fascist or an anarchist, but it does not provide the kind of political identity that nationality provides' (Miller 1995: 163). Miller and others have emphasised the importance of a cultural bond between citizens, antecedent to the institutional loyalties referred to by Habermas and the condition of the social bond described by Offe. Anthony Smith refers to this bond as 'collective cultural identity ... a sense of shared continuity on the part of successive generations of a given unit of population, and to shared memories of earlier periods, events and personages in the history of the unit ... [and] the collective belief in a common destiny of that unit and its culture.' (Smith 1992: 58). Of course, the origins of 'identity' are as elusive as those of 'trust' and 'solidarity', which means that these authors understandably prefer to focus on the conditions under which they believe collective identity *cannot* emerge rather than postulate those under which it may. Their analyses, like Offe's, have a pessimistic flavour. 'The absence of a European communication system,' writes Dieter Grimm, 'due chiefly to language diversity, has the consequence that for the foreseeable future there will be neither a European public nor a European political discourse.' (Grimm 1995: 296).

Each of these analyses of the normative foundations of the EU makes a significant assumption that may be questioned. It regards the way that non-elites conceive of politics in Europe and how they situate themselves in its processes. The point is perhaps best highlighted by avoiding for now the notions of social, constitutional and cultural bonds and reframing discussion in terms of an explicitly *political* bond. In its weak form, this political bond can be understood as a sense of shared predicament felt by a set of individuals or groups, the sense that their problems are the same; in its strong form it is when such individuals / groups not only feel themselves facing the same problems but also see their fates as entwined and therefore needing to be addressed collectively. It is the sense of being 'locked in' to a situation together, something which is crucial to any political community.

Whether this analytical distinction between shared predicament and shared fate may be maintained in practice is a question for

empirical study. Even the two combined (i.e. a strong political bond) may be insufficient to sustain a polity – the relationship after all is a pragmatic one. It is not – at first, at least – the very fact of sharing which in itself is of value, but rather the advantages of doing so when faced with the demands of a particular situation.⁶ What is important though is that arguably, at least as far as concerns strangers, a sense both of shared predicament and shared fate must develop *before* any social bond of solidarity can do so. This much, one imagines, would be little disputed by the ‘solidarists’ and the constitutional-patriotists – it is something implied by Offe’s notion of the unifying ‘idea of liberation’, and it is present in Habermas to the extent that the constitutional values to be celebrated ‘stand for’ something and thus are a ‘stand against’ other, more dangerous, things. Culturalists might be more sceptical, arguing that a sense of shared fate is derivative of outward signs of collectivity such as language, appearance and territory. But even they would presumably acknowledge that not all such cultural markers come to be ascribed normative significance, nor do those that have necessarily maintain it. The sense of shared predicament, even in a culturalist interpretation, can be considered important as a criterion of which cultural markers carry enduring meaning.

Despite implying such a political bond, these authors seem to take for granted that its structure will be uniform across issue-areas. That is, it is assumed that people cannot feel a sense of shared predicament in one issue-area without at the same time feeling it in all issue-areas. Common to most of the authors is a tendency to think in terms of horizontal layers of what is shared (i.e. European) and not shared (national or subnational) by the peoples of Europe, a ladder-of-generality approach which allows little nuancing according to issue-area. Consider Offe’s notions of trust and solidarity: ‘Europeans,’ he writes, ‘still think of themselves primarily in national terms; they have not yet developed the relations of trust and solidarity on the European level that would be necessary to underpin a stronger European governing capacity.’ (Offe 2000: 12) This implication is clearly that of monolithic layers. A similar conceptual framework can be found in the constitutional-patriotist approach: J.H.H. Weiler envisages European citizens having ‘contemporaneous membership in an organic national-cultural demos and in a supranational civic, value-driven demos’ (Weiler 1995: 256), whilst Habermas expresses the same with his notion of a shared political culture. His occasional use of the vocabulary of identity also rules out sensitivity to the specificity of different issue-areas.⁷ A layered model is invoked most straightforwardly by the culturalists: ‘in the ancient world,’ writes Smith, ‘it was possible to be Athenian, Ionian and Greek all at the same time; in the medieval world, to be Bernese, Swiss and Protestant; in the modern Third World to be Ibo, Nigerian and African simultaneously. Similarly, one could feel simultaneously Catalan, Spanish and European; even – dare one say it? – Scottish-or-English, British and European.’ (Smith 1992: 67-8).

Such a conceptual model is certainly attractive, since it coheres with the notion of multi-level government. The notion of tiers of identity lends legitimacy to the notion of tiers of government. But it may be restrictive of normative discussion of the EU’s future. For if trust and solidarity (the social bond) can be said to emerge only once the sense of shared predicament and fate (the political bond) has developed, the proper subject of investigation surely needs to be the institutional structures which are capable of managing that transition. This is, however, precisely what the authors cited do not explore, because the vocabulary and the conceptual frameworks they use are not appropriate to conceiving of that ‘messy phase’ in which the boundaries concerning with whom predicaments and fate

are shared may vary significantly according to issue-area.⁸ The evolution of the political bond goes unexplored because it is assumed to be something which is unitary and uniform.

It might be objected, of course, that to criticise existing normative theory for its presumption of the consistency of popular beliefs is to make an overly literal reading of it. It necessarily operates, one might point out, at a certain level of abstraction, is intended to be prescriptive rather than descriptive, and so to argue against it on the grounds of descriptive inaccuracy is unhelpful, perhaps naïve. Such critiques, it might be said, are ‘behaviouralist’, and do not intersect with the concerns of political philosophy. To take this position, however, would be to immunise such theory from all criticism other than that related to its internal logic. Clearly, what one can normatively advocate is inseparable from the starting-point that is one’s understanding of reality. If a certain level of coherence in mass views is an ideal to be realised, one first of all needs to engage with these views as they are now, since this may suggest how they will evolve.

Prima facie, there are reasons to suppose that the political bond is not uniform. By way of an anecdotal illustration, consider the two Irish referenda on the Nice Treaty, which differed in outcome largely according to which issue-area was the dominant frame: in the first, the No-campaign successfully presented the vote as a referendum on institutional clarity and representation; in the second, the Yes-campaign was able to present it as a referendum on extending the economic benefits of EU membership to the candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The voting outcome was quite different in each case, not least because there was no consistency of views across these two issue-areas.⁹ As another example of disparity, consider the often-noted unity between the populations of Europe (not their governments) at the time of the 2003 Iraq war – a sense of shared predicament and fate in foreign policy (the need collectively to oppose a US-led war) which was not simultaneously evident in other policy areas such as immigration, where the shifting of obligations to neighbouring countries has remained a political vote-winner.

Looking at the political bond means looking, for any given-issue area, at how widely people cast the boundary of those facing a shared predicament, and – more than this – a shared fate. For research concerned with the EU, the question of shared predicament can be stated in practical terms (operationalised) as that of whether a given social group sees the whole range of political issues as domestic (the difference between national and regional of less interest here) or whether there are some which it sees in wider terms as transnational in origin and scope. Whether a sense of shared predicament implies also a sense of shared fate can be addressed by looking at whether those issue-areas seen as transnational are also considered to require policy-making formed at a higher than national level, be this by intergovernmental or supranational political means, or by non-governmental actors.

The Political Bond as a Set of Beliefs

I have argued that the political bond tends to be treated in unitary form without attention to possible variation between issue-areas: it tends, one can therefore say, to be considered as an integrated belief system, defined by the political psychologist Philip E. Converse as ‘a configuration of ideas and attitudes in which the elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence.’ (Converse 1964: 207).

This notion of 'constraint' is a critical one. Converse's major work, 'The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics' (1964) is still held as one of the seminal texts in political psychology. Its subject of study is the left-right political spectrum and how far it is invoked as an organising principle by the ordinary American voter. 'Constraint' is introduced as a means by which to assess the degree of ideological consistency exhibited by an individual. 'In the static case,' writes Converse, "'constraint" may be taken to mean the success we would have in predicting, given initial knowledge that an individual holds a specified attitude, that he holds certain further ideas and attitudes. ... In the dynamic case, "constraint" or "interdependence" refers to the probability that a change in the perceived status (truth, desirability, and so forth) of one idea-element would *psychologically* require, from the point of view of the actor, some compensating change(s) in the status of idea-elements elsewhere in the configuration.' (Converse 1964: 207-8). An illustration from domestic politics would be as follows: an individual is known to advocate the socially progressive policy of positive discrimination in the workplace in favour of under-represented ethnic minorities. To what extent can one infer from this that he or she is also the holder of economically progressive views on wealth redistribution, and to what extent would a reevaluation of the worth of positive discrimination (due let us say to statistics that convince the individual it benefits recent immigrants over the native-born) necessitate a reorientation on the question of wealth distribution?

Converse distinguishes between three different sources of constraint: logical, psychological and social. The first is the most straightforward: when two views are inseparable or incompatible for reasons of logic (though the logic may sometimes go unnoticed). Psychological sources of constraint are likely to be more common: here the component idea elements are *experienced* by those initiated in the belief system as being logically constrained, each following one from another, even though to the outsider the relationship might appear more arbitrary and a matter of 'cultural accumulation'. (Converse 1964: 210) In the case of the third type, the social sources of constraint, perceived group interests are active in shaping the belief system, which may often be a legitimisation device (an ideology) for the pursuit of these interests.

The concept of constraint can be applied to the political bond as introduced above. The belief system concerns with whom predicaments and fate are understood to be shared; its idea-elements are the beliefs held on this for any given issue-area. Here too, constraint can be derived from a logical, a psychological or a social source. *Logically*, one cannot view environmental pollution as a shared predicament (because it does not respect borders) without at the same time considering as a shared predicament the macro-economic health on which depends a particular country's ability to control environmental pollution. The belief about the one constrains – albeit perhaps purely logically – the belief about the other. *Psychological* sources of constraint can be found in neoliberal beliefs about the proper form of a common market: the idea, for example, that the 'four freedoms' of movement – labour, goods, services and capital – must go together. There is at least the veneer of logic, though it is dependent on a prior acceptance of certain value preferences, for example that long-term macro-economic benefits outweigh short-term socio-economic disruption. An illustration of *social* sources of constraint can be found in various brands of Euroscepticism, where the notion that predicaments and fate are shared in *any* issue-area tends to be consistently opposed: consider the undifferentiated hostility to the EU shown by the regulation-wary Murdoch press in Britain, or that to be found in much of the British Conservative Party, seemingly inspired by the desire to maintain, in

the face of erosion from Brussels, the sovereignty of the natural ruling class of Britain. Belief systems, it should be noted of course, are not free of the interference of other, more 'central', belief systems: Margaret Thatcher, for example, was hostile to the European Community in most areas of political life, but her free-market ideology and commitment to European defence were yet stronger, hence her advocacy of the EC common market and certain applications of the ecu, plus the development of the Western European Union. (Thatcher 1988).

The concrete examples just given concern the beliefs of elites – newspapers and political platforms. What of the lay voter? Using this terminology from political psychology, one can say that in assuming that the political bond is uniform, the existing literature assumes strong constraint – whether derived from logical, psychological or social sources – across popular conceptions of shared predicament and shared fate from one issue-area to another. This, however, goes against the most basic point which Converse wishes to stress, and which has become established orthodoxy in the field of political psychology:¹⁰ that other than for elites the exercise of constraint across the range of idea-elements of any given belief-system tends to be sporadic at best. Knowledge of 'what goes with what', and why, is information that has to be diffused from above, and 'very little information "trickles down" very far.' (Converse 1964: 213) In contrast to those who assume a strong role for political discourse and the media in shaping popular beliefs, Converse talks of 'a basis discontinuity between the "message-as-sent" and the "message-as-received".' (Converse 1975: 81) The fallacy is therefore to assume that the constraint one recognises at the elite level is replicated in the population at large.¹¹ Irregular sets of beliefs, rather than *systems* of beliefs, may be the norm. Hence the problem of assuming a uniform political bond.

To question the degree of *constraint between* idea-elements does not necessarily imply questioning the degree of *consistency within* them, i.e. the extent to which people adopt the same stance with regard to shared predicament and/or fate on different specific issues within the same general issue-area (two specific hazards, for example, both connected to the broader problem of environmental pollution). Some recent research has sought to emphasise the 'consistency within' that can derive from the way political parties and the media bundle together specific issues so that new information is set in the context of old.¹² Politicians and commentators tend not to address the question of immigration, for example, from a radically different perspective from one day to the next. Likewise there is likely to be some consistency in whatever daily experiences (those connected to occupation for example) may also inform an individual's political views.

One must be careful, of course, not to slip back into the assumption of a perfect transfer of information from those 'sending' to those 'receiving'. Also, to assume a very high degree of 'consistency within' does beg questions regarding how a belief system can, as we may expect that it does, evolve. It makes sense therefore to take up another concept of Converse's – 'centrality' – which allows us to speak of some idea-elements being more stable than others. Centrality can be divided into two types, motivational and cognitive (Converse 1970; 1975: 96-7). Loosely defined, motivational centrality refers to the perceived *importance* of an idea-element to the subject, cognitive centrality to the proportion of *mental time* which is invested in it. The second of these is a more helpful concept in two respects:¹³ research has suggested that it is a more reliable guide to attitude stability (that 'knowing more' about a issue is what leads to consistency of views over time rather than 'caring more'¹⁴); also it is likely to be easier to measure.¹⁵

The concept is useful for two reasons, the first being simply that it encourages one to avoid the trap of thinking that all popular attitudes are in a state of random flux, which clearly would be devastating from a political theoretical perspective. This is a much discussed problem in political psychology and there is a spectrum of views regarding the stability of popular attitudes, ranging from those inclined to ascribe evidence of widespread instability to faulty research methodology or real changes in the object-environment, to those who are dubious as to the very existence of 'true attitudes'.¹⁶ Significantly, even those at the radically sceptical end acknowledge the possibility that issue-areas that are cognitively central for a subject may be seen with consistency over time. The argument of John Zaller, for instance, is that publics generally have a plurality of things that they *could* say about an issue and that when asked they pick the one which – for one reason or another – happens to be at the top of their minds (due to chance factors such as the headlines of yesterday's news, or to systemic factors such as how the question was framed). (Zaller 1992: 54) It is a position which has attracted a great deal of criticism for being overly reductive,¹⁷ but it is notable that even Zaller does not dismiss the significance of cognitive centrality: 'persons who are highly engaged with an issue may ... develop the crystallised attitudes that most opinion researchers take to be the norm.'¹⁸ This is an important qualification of his point, and Converse too deliberately seeks to warn against an overly pessimistic interpretation of his observations: 'they are frequently misinterpreted as saying that not much of anybody has political opinions about much of anything. This is a disastrous misconception, for it fits no data at all. On any kind of reasonable item that taps a major policy debate, a substantial fraction of the electorate suffers no gross deficiencies of information and has highly developed and often vehement positions of its own.' (Converse 1975: 83) Note also that the sense of shared predicament is defined rather less demandingly than Zaller's 'crystallised opinions' or Converse's 'vehement positions': it refers to 'ways of seeing' (e.g. transnational versus domestic) rather than specific beliefs *per se*¹⁹, and the assumption is that, for issue-areas which are cognitively central to them, whilst people may show (regardless of real changes in the environment) some inconsistency over time *vis-à-vis* themselves in this, nonetheless they are still likely to show consistency in their difference from other people.²⁰

The second reason the concept is important is that it allows one to speak of how a set of beliefs may evolve. In our earlier discussion constraint was taken to be a property of a belief system as a whole. This is correct, in that idea-elements entirely unconstrained by other idea-elements may be said to exist outside the belief-system altogether; however, it is also true that constraint will be stronger between some idea-elements than between others, according to their centrality to the subject. Two fictional illustrations may serve to make this clearer, one concerning the sense of shared predicament, the other the sense of shared fate. Consider first a French blue-collar worker – a bus-driver, for instance – whose interest in the problem of transborder environmental pollution is generally not great.²¹ He lived through the Chernobyl crisis as an adolescent but remembers it only vaguely as a problem that affected the East. The environment is barely a political issue for him. Then one day he hears a radio news feature concerning British beef, its possible contamination from BSE and the latent threat of a pandemic of Creutzfeld-Jakob Disease; the import of British beef has been suspended but the damage may already have been done, and suddenly he is one of thousands of listeners ringing in to demand answers. The persistent recollection of some awful Normandy barbecue ignites a whole range of new interests in the man: naturally

he becomes sensitive to other potential transnational threats in the area of food hygiene (now a central issue-area to him), and he willingly starts to regard GMO foods as a US-versus-Europe issue; but the importance of other issue-areas is awakened also, other transnational hazards are recognised, including environmental pollution, and oil spills from the Bay of Biscay to the Baltic suddenly take on significance as 'symptomatic' of a wider problem. Whether this is just a political phase he goes through before ultimately returning to a state of apathy is not important here, nor whether he sees one political institution or another as providing a regulatory solution: what is important is how a change in the status of a central issue-area (its 'transnationalisation') affects the status of other, less central issue-areas.

A second illustration concerns the question of shared fate; conceive of a middle-manager of a small Bavarian cheese-manufacturing company. She is a supporter of the recently introduced euro as it has benefited the export of her cheese. She thinks the EU is a good thing in various other respects too – in caring for the environment, for example, and generally helping third-world countries. Over a discussion one evening, a politically-minded former school friend draws her attention to the fact that the EU has a bad track record of managing overseas development aid and argues that this is 'typical of Brussels incompetence'. The complaint falls on deaf ears though, and sensing her cheese-manufacturing friend is unimpressed she switches to the inability of the EU member states to agree a common position on the Iraq war that is filling the airwaves. Our middle-manager believes wars are bad regardless of who wages them, and prefers not to think about it. A third friend joins them, is updated on the conversation and fair-mindedly points out that EU development aid has actually become considerably more efficient in the last five years relative to the national programmes of the EU-15, and that several African countries are benefiting. The conversation strays. Some months later, however, back at the office, our middle-manager receives from the senior manager a Powerpoint presentation illustrating how profits have fallen due to inflationary costs since the introduction of the euro. The graphs are well laid-out and powerful. Her view of supranational currency regulation changes. She starts to see it as bad for German manufacturing, a subversive imposition from Brussels. Suddenly, with the vehemence of a convert, she becomes hostile towards all outside meddling in domestic economic affairs and resents EU activity in this field. Rather, the EU should stick to managing the environment and helping third-world countries. In summary: new information concerning less central issue-areas was glossed over by the subject, indicating low constraint between these issue-areas; but a subsequent revaluation of a central issue-area did cause a revaluation of the extent of shared fate, though without consequence for the less central issue-areas.

Centrality can act as a guide, then, to the patterns by which beliefs may spill over from one issue-area to another, and to the kinds of new information which might be required to inspire this. It was suggested above that – at least as concerns the left-right political spectrum, the subject of most of the relevant literature – for any given issue-area there will be a significantly sized group of people to whom it is cognitively central and so of whom relatively stable ways of seeing can be expected. These groups, generally minority sub-divisions of the broader population, have been labelled 'issue publics', to one or several of which any individual may belong.²² To a degree, differences in education levels may account for variation in the number of issue publics to which an individual belongs, though it is also a matter of accumulation: those who know more can make better use of new information, and so those who are informed about several issues are likely to be informed about many.²³ Between the

extremes of those who are entirely unengaged politically and those who are engaged in a very broad range of political issues, affiliation to an issue public is likely to correspond partly to the issues of greatest salience in public life and partly to the issues raised in the course of daily personal activity.

With regard to our investigation of the political bond in the populations of Europe, it can be stated that the members of an issue public are those who not only accept a given issue-area as being political (on which politicians can be held accountable) but also who devote an amount of time to thinking about it, have some degree of knowledge concerning it, and – as a derivation of these – are likely to show some degree of consistency over time in the way they regard it. Certainly the members of an issue public will not necessarily feel in that issue-area either a shared predicament or a shared fate with others across borders; in some they may, in others not. This is where constraint comes back in – the degree to which disagreement on this can be tolerated. And this, as was suggested above, is likely to correspond to the relative centrality of the issue-areas in question.

The Political Bond in Europe: a Research Agenda

What has been presented here is a thesis: that the political bond may not be as uniform as implied in the literature. It does, however, face counter-objections. Could it be, for example, that today's mass-media-age European publics are politically more sophisticated than the US population of the 1950s/60s, and that the weakness of constraint to be found in the one should not be inferred in the others?²⁴ Possibly, but in studying the left-right political divide Converse was studying a belief system invoked fairly regularly in daily political life, and generally uncontested as an organising framework for political ideas. The idea-elements were at least packaged according to the belief-system, even if they were not reliably received in this form by the bulk of the population. This cannot usually be said of the belief system concerning the political bond in today's Europe. Indeed, the significance of borders in a general sense tends to be considered quite rarely (Britain's Eurosceptic press being something of an exception, and even this being rather less consistent than one might imagine²⁵): rather, it seems fair to say that discussion in public discourse tends to be issue-driven, at most asking 'are other countries facing this problem too, and can anything be done about it transnationally?'. To expect populations to reconstruct the belief system in full from the isolated idea-elements in this way is, ostensibly at least, unrealistic, and so constraint between these elements can hardly be assumed.

Indeed, ongoing structural changes in the way that knowledge is acquired would seem only to diminish the likelihood of such constraint. Whilst the point is sometimes over-emphasised, it remains true that today people draw their news increasingly not just from the television or the pages of a newspaper but from the internet, a medium which invites the user to see only that which they wish to see, to filter what it is that they are exposed to. Online news sources can be tailored to the interests and preferences of the individual user, a phenomenon which has been referred to as resulting in 'The Daily Me' [Negroponte 1995; Sunstein 2001]. Thematised chatrooms and email groups encourage specialisation, the in-depth exploration of a select number of topics. The result is that, despite the continued importance of the traditional media in projecting the major news stories, populations are no longer exposed to a single harmonised news agenda to anything like the same degree as for much of the twentieth century. Rather, subgroups may become more

and more immersed in the few topics which they consider important to them, with relatively few occasions to stumble upon new issues by accident. The internet encourages the formation of 'issue publics' in other words. The overall belief system may recede into the background, suggesting once more that there may not be strong constraint in beliefs across the range of political issue-areas. The internet perhaps also encourages those who are part of an issue public to adopt a broader-than-national perspective, since territorial boundaries do not limit what they are exposed to and the discussions that they may participate in. The nature of the issue itself, rather than simply the way it is packaged in the conventional media, may increasingly determine the dimensions of the political space it is seen to be operating within.

Objections remain however. Why, for example, treat the sense of shared predicament and shared fate in a given issue-area as prior to a social bond, rather than expecting (in a more culturalist vein) people to identify with one another on the basis of markers of some outward kind, from which they infer a shared fate and predicament? If the latter were the case, the political bond might retain a degree of uniformity. Those in the field of political psychology who study heuristics might support this objection. Once people know what they think of a particular out-group, for example, this may allow them to display attitudes towards any issue connected to that group with some consistency. With regard to the political bond in Europe one might reason that if high proportions of people are simply xenophobic in a general sense (i.e. they employ the heuristic 'outsiders are bad and to be avoided') this may lead them to refuse to see themselves sharing any predicament or fate with others across borders.

Before someone can apply a xenophobia heuristic to a particular issue-area though they will need to have the requisite information that allows them to think of the issue-area a) as political, and b) as transnational in dimension. Such information levels may be expected to be present for some issue-areas but not for others;²⁶ this in itself suggests that the political bond is likely to be displayed in irregular fashion. Also, the importance of visual markers varies significantly according to context: consider the attitude of a football crowd to a foreign player on their team. It is his ability that generally determines whether he is viewed favourably or not, with criticism relating to his status as a foreigner normally coming only once he has shown himself to be incompetent in advancing the team's cause. The predicament, rather than the markers to which a xenophobia heuristic might be applied, seems to be the key.²⁷

But this is still to a large extent conjecture, and the need for some empirical research is evident. We do not know whether population groups do in fact perceive shared predicament and shared fate more widely in some issue-areas than others, and with what stability over time. Findings on these questions would be important whether one's political vision of Europe were federalist, sceptical or 'pragmatic', though in advance of such findings one needs to keep comments regarding the possible implications for institutional design to a minimum. Clearly, if constraint between issue-areas turned out to be high, or if affiliation to more than one issue public were rare, then it might be possible to continue thinking in terms of 'shifting politics' to the 'European level' or 'maintaining it' at the 'national level'. If, alternatively, it seemed that substantial portions of the electorate were a part of more than one issue public, but held the political bond differently for each, a more complex approach might be necessary.

Embedding flexibility in the EU's institutional structure would be only part of the answer. A legal application of the principle of

subsidiarity, still the generally favoured approach, would probably look insufficient, since the weak link between institutional structures and popular beliefs would mean the simple fact of changing competences on specific issue-areas would risk going unappreciated. Even if it were appreciated, more would need to be known about the stability of people's views before such changes could be considered meaningful responses to beliefs. Moreover, assuming some disagreement across groups within countries, and between countries, there would be no institutional arrangement of competences, in the absence of a social bond, capable of satisfying all.

Arguably the key would be not only to ensure that the possibility of change is present in the institutional structures but also to ensure – and to publicise – the political, rather than legal, character of the review process that looked at such questions. This, after all, is how disagreement and deficits in knowledge are generally managed. But a political review process conducted by whom? The challenge of institutional design would be to conceive of the forum in which such a process could be conducted: a forum able to command political consent both from those whose sense of shared fate on a particular issue extended beyond the borders of their state, and from those who did not even regard the issue in question as of transnational origin and scope.

Endnotes

1 Crucially the introduction of Qualified Majority Voting into the Council's decision-making process, weakening the claim of national governments to be able to represent their citizens' interests on all issues.

2 Similar ideas are pursued by the same author elsewhere (Offe 1999). For a statistical study of trust in the EU populations see Niedermayer (1995).

3 For others taking an essentially similar approach, see Cronin (2003) and Giddens (2000).

4 The European lawyer J. H. H. Weiler, though for different reasons retaining some scepticism regarding an EU constitution, likewise points out that 'although conceptually the nation is the condition for the State, historically, it has often been the State which constituted the nation by imposing a language and/or prioritising a dialect and/or privileging a certain historical narrative and/or creating symbols and myths.' (Weiler 1995: 239)

5 Note, for instance, how he speaks of the 'new awareness of what Europeans have in common [finding] ... an admirable expression in the EU Charter of Basic Rights.' (Habermas 2001a: 21)

6 Charles Taylor distinguishes between convergent and common goods (1995: 190-1): 'we enjoy security from various dangers through our system of national defence, our police forces, our fire departments ... in my language they are convergent [goods], because all this concerns only how we have to go about providing them ... In the unlikely event that an individual could secure it [the good] for himself, he would be getting the same valued condition that we all get now from social provision.' Whereas (1995: 192) 'the bond of solidarity with my compatriots in a functioning republic is based on a sense of shared fate, where the sharing itself is of value.' The distinction is broadly the same as that made in political

science between utilitarian and affective support for a polity.

7 Habermas 2001a: 17: 'what forms the common core of a European identity is the character of the painful learning process it has gone through, as much as its results. It is the lasting memory of nationalist excess and moral abyss that lends to our present commitments the quality of a peculiar achievement.'

8 Of course, whether the peoples of Europe are currently in such a transition phase (in the sense that their attitudes are 'going somewhere') is not clear. A fractured political bond may simply be the hallmark of a post-modern condition in which politics is decentralised and lacks cohesion. But this is a secondary point.

9 The point should not be overstated – voting in the second referendum was of course not independent of the outcome of the first, and so the framing of the issues clearly not the sole factor involved.

10 The main counter-position is that represented in the scholarship on heuristics, which is covered at the end of this essay.

11 The degree of constraint between issue-areas does not automatically invite a value judgement regarding citizen competence. Naturally, one man's constraint is another man's dogmatism, and quite reasonable arguments can be made for why some issue-areas should be seen in transnational terms but not others (consider Thatcher once again).

12 See the later work of Paul M. Sniderman, e.g. Sniderman and Bullock (2003), drawing on Carmines and Layman (1997: 283-316).

13 It may well be of course that the two tend to go together – people who know more about something care more about it (though not necessarily the other way round).

14 See Zaller (1992: 68-9). C.f. Sniderman and Bullock (2003: 599): 'the better informed they are, the less they are likely to be handicapped by their absolute lack of knowledge.'

15 Motivational centrality is liable to be treated in a circular fashion: the only means by which one can ascertain that an issue is central to a subject in this sense is by noting that their attitudes towards it remain stable, which is to infer from the consequence back to the supposed reason. Cognitive centrality, on the other hand, can be read from separate indicators such as alertness to new information and the ability to retain it, plus the interlinkage of an issue with other issues.

16 For an early discussion of the issues involved see Converse 1970. For development of these themes, see the authors mentioned in the following footnotes.

17 See for example Sniderman *et al.* (2001: 254-88). They reject Zaller's argument that people generally 'make it up as they go along' as 'an extraordinary assertion' (256) and contend that his data show greater stability of attitudes over time than he suggests, also pointing out (266) an apparent contradiction in that if question-framing is as important as he suggests then asking the same questions at different times should give rather stable results.

18 Zaller (1992: 54-5). One feels that one of the reasons he does not develop this further, and with it the idea of 'issue publics' as discussed below, is that the data he is working with does not allow him to.

19 C.f. the conventional definition of terms (Kavanagh 1983): an 'opinion' is understood as a view *on a subject*, an 'attitude' being a more general stance, and a 'belief' being an attitude deeply held.

20 C.f. Sniderman *et al.* (2001: 264) on this: 'even when people behave differently in one situation than in another, they tend to respond the same way relative to one another. A bigot will respond more negatively to African Americans in some situations than in others: but in all situations where there is any choice, a bigot will respond more negatively to African Americans than a person who is racially tolerant.' I.e. the effect of situational cues (like question-framing) will be weaker for some (those that generally know about that issue) than for others.

21 The following can also be expressed in formal terms, along the lines of Converse 1970: 185. Consider an individual X subscribing to a set of beliefs Y, of which we may single out two idea-elements, A and B. New information is given to X resulting in an imbalance in the set of beliefs Y such that the accustomed ways of thinking about A and B become incompatible. How is X likely to react? If idea-element A is more central to X than B then the way of thinking about B is likely to change whilst that towards A remains constant. If neither A nor B is central to X then the ways of thinking about neither need change: dissonance between the two may be tolerated or simply unnoticed (indeed the new information creating the dissonance may be forgotten). If both A and B are of high centrality to X then he may reject the authenticity of the new information, permitting the ways of seeing both to remain unchanged; or, if the information is so compelling that it cannot be rejected, some form of crisis may ensue and a major overhaul of the whole set of beliefs Y may be required.

22 See Converse (1964: 245). The concept has been developed by David J. Elkins (1993). On the question of how many issue publics an individual is likely to belong to there is some disagreement: according to Converse (1964: 218), 17.5% of his sample of the US population showed no interest whatsoever in specific issue-related policies; Elkins however, studying the population of British Columbia thirty years later, emphasises rather a possible plurality of interests: 'few people are "single-issue fanatics"', he suggests (1993: 38).

23 For a discussion of the relative importance of education and partisan involvement as predictors of attitude stability, see Converse (1975: 103-4).

24 Also to be noted is later research by Converse (1975: 93) and others suggesting that the American public became *more* ideological towards the end of the 1960s and that constraint in the population of the late 1950s might have been unusually faint; the difference is one of degree however, and the basic points retain their validity.

25 See a content analysis of the *Daily Mail* newspaper during the 2001/2 saga of the British 'planespotter' arrested in Greece, in White (2003).

26 This criticism of the heuristics approach has been made before – see Luskin (2002: 286).

27 Even the culturalist David Miller stresses the instrumental way in which markers tend to be invoked: 'one can be both Catalan and Spanish ... perhaps emphasising different aspects of the double identity in different contexts or for different purposes.' (Miller 2000: 130).

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