

Clash of Cultures:

Two Milieus in the European Union's "A New Narrative for Europe" Project

ABSTRACT:

Framing narratives about shared history, norms and the future can be an important practice of creating transnational memory in Europe. This was the task of the European Union's "A New Narrative for Europe" project initiated by the European Parliament and implemented by the European Commission during 2013-14. Some 20 people from the cultural sphere formed a so-called Cultural Committee that eventually submitted the declaration "New Narrative for Europe: The Mind and Body of Europe" to the Commission President and the German Chancellor in Berlin on 1 March 2014. Analyzing the process of narrative production illustrates the strict limits of such top-down cultural engineering in a transnational polity like the EU, however. It highlights in particular, the deep schism between the two milieus of politicians and officials in Brussels and people from culture, their lack of narrative consistency and their inability to disseminate their "new narrative" more widely under conditions of ad hoc transnational public spheres constituted by major crises, not declarations.

KEYWORDS: European narratives, European Union, European culture, History politics, Memory politics

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"Europe" needs "a new narrative" to legitimize the European Union's geographical and functional expansion or perhaps even, in the face of the populist surge in the 2014 European elections, to justify its very existence. Equating "Europe" and the EU, this is at least what the initiators of an EU-funded cultural project believed when it was set in motion in 2012, initially to last for two years during 2013-14. The project's objective was to "contribute to raising the interest in the creative sector and to incite European opinion formers to make their voice heard", thus "associating the creative sector and the citizens to revamp the narrative of Europe" (Interview Andreu-Romeo).

Having originated in the European Parliament, the European Commission controlled the project's administrative implementation. At the beginning of 2013 it formed a so-called Cultural Committee of some 20 "artists, intellectuals and scientists" from across Europe chaired by Paul Dujardin, the Artistic Director of the Centre for Fine Arts (Bozar), a prestigious Belgian cultural institution in Brussels. The programme was launched in the presence of three Commissioners including President José Manuel Barroso, several committee members and some 70 invited guests in Brussels in April 2013. It was followed by three so-called general assemblies with larger plenary audiences in Warsaw in June 2013, in Rome in November 2013 and in Berlin at the beginning of March 2014. At this last assembly in Berlin's Academy of Fine Arts the Cultural Committee presented its so-called declaration "New Narrative for Europe: The Mind and Body of Europe" (European Commission 2014b) to Barroso and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, with the aim of disseminating it further at cultural events across Europe.

Narratives are accounts, or stories, of connected events or experiences which are designed to make sense of cultural, socio-economic and political developments. They are one of several rhetorical modes of discourse to create, disseminate and align ways of thinking among people – in this case among citizens in the transnational polity of the EU. Remembering collectively relies on such narratives, or stories, which are shared within a social and political community. Thus, framing a “new narrative for Europe” is part of, and can potentially contribute to, what the special issue editors call “practices of transnational memory”. Narrative production already played a crucial role in European nation-building, national integration and state formation processes in the nineteenth century. National narratives at the time created and structured traditions and sought to align and nationalize collective memory to legitimize newly formed states and political systems and domestic and foreign policy goals (Anderson 1991).

In the nineteenth century, cultural elites invented, shaped, disseminated and connected these narratives to the goals of emerging political movements and parties. Writing new narratives for the nation was largely an elite-driven social process, in which state institutions only took greater control – especially through their education policies – after the formation of new states like Italy and Germany or the consolidation of new political systems as in Third Republic France. Invariably, cultural elites including historians constructed their narratives as the long-term evolution of national culture, or civilization, and nationhood (Berger and Lorenz 2010). The apparently congruent national narration of events and experiences from heroic battles to collective suffering under the yoke of foreign rule served to strengthen political demands for independence and statehood.

Cultural elites have also played an important role in advancing the idea of European integration. Different and sometimes competing narratives of European integration have traditionally drawn on historical events and experiences such as the idea of a unified medieval

Occidental Europe, references to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment as the breakthrough of “European” norms and values such as individualism and the rule of law, or more recently, the period from 1914 to 1945 as a European “civil war”. In an analogy with the foundation myth of the United States, the narrative of the “founding fathers”, too, has (contemporary) historical connotations (Kaiser 2012). The EU itself regularly draws on this trope in its own self-representation (Kølvraa 2010; Joly 2007), as Oriane Calligaro also shows in her article in this special issue.

Against this background, this article analyzes the Narrative for Europe project as an express attempt by individual members of the EU’s political and bureaucratic elites to motivate members of a partly transnationally constituted cultural milieu to frame a new narrative for Europe and the EU. Based on document analysis, interviews and peer observation at all general assemblies and several Cultural Committee meetings, the first section reconstructs the political initiative and traces the committee’s formation and work. The second section then discusses the scope and content of its declaration, which makes only eclectic references to contemporary historical experience. Instead it emphasizes currently prevailing norms and values and makes future-oriented claims.

The third section analyzes the reasons for the absence of a long-term historical perspective, the frictions in the process and the project’s near failure to at least deliver the declaration as its core objective. It argues that these problems largely resulted from strong dissonances within and especially between two milieus, their associated cultures and operational modes, which clashed during the Narrative for Europe project: first, a goal-oriented political-bureaucratic milieu primarily interested in garnering political support for the EU in advance of the 2014 European elections, discharging funds efficiently and delivering the declaration; and second, a cultural milieu characterized by extreme individualism and near total lack of agreement on the EU’s nature and desirable development. The resulting yawning gap was

only partially bridged by a few committee members whose experience as cultural policy entrepreneurs and lobbyists for cultural organisations in Brussels transcended the two milieus and their operational modes.

Analysing the Narrative for Europe project thus demonstrates the ad hoc nature of this and similar Commission initiatives in the past; the disjuncture between two segregated milieus without shared agendas or compatible operational modes, which differs strongly from the nineteenth century experience; and the ineffectiveness of such bureaucratic initiatives in influencing collective memory in a polity with partly transnationally constituted elites, but without a common public sphere for disseminating narratives consistently across space and time.

From Parliamentary Initiative to the Cultural Committee

In 2012 Morten Løkkegaard, a Danish Venstre Party and Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe MEP and Vice-Chair of the Committee for Culture and Education, conducted the annual budget negotiations on behalf of the Committee. With the support of the Budget Committee he succeeded in amending the budget to insert funding for a so-called pilot action that would bring together between 15 and 20 “people from culture” for a period of twelve to twenty months to discuss “a new narrative for Europe”. Løkkegaard, a former newspaper and TV journalist, felt that as a result of the “lack of a public space ... the communication issue [was becoming] a cultural issue” in the EU. He wanted to mobilize cultural elites in Denmark and elsewhere to come out more strongly in support of the EU (Interview Løkkegaard).

In his own parliamentary party in the EP, however, “no-one showed any interest in this”.

Instead, Barroso’s office rang the Danish MEP and offered to run the pilot action. According

to Løkkegaard, Barroso showed a strong “substantive interest in culture” and turned the pilot action into “a personal project for him as for me” (Interview Løkkegaard). In the Commission two officials became responsible for managing it: Jaime Andreu-Romeo, Adviser Citizens in the Directorate General for Communication, and Inés Sérvulo Correia from the Bureau of European Policy Advisers who report directly to the Commission President. In fact, Barroso had already participated in two roundtable discussions about the role of culture in European integration with some of his staff and people from the cultural sphere like Dujardin in 2011 and 2012, something that had strengthened existing and created new contacts, especially with the Bozar (Interview Museeuw). Barroso subsequently included a call to the cultural sphere and intellectuals in his State of the Union Address to the European Parliament on 12 September 2012 (European Commission 2012). As a result of these initiatives, the Commission was prepared for Løkkegaard’s budget amendment.

From Barroso’s perspective, “the politics of implicit consent” in the EU were definitely over (Interview Andreu-Romeo). Until the economic and financial crisis the objectives of “peace, prosperity and democracy” had legitimized the EU. But “what is the rationale for union” now, especially for younger generations who apparently take the postwar integration achievements for granted (Interview Sérvulo Correia)? As Barroso himself put it in his speech to the Narrative for Europe project’s general assembly in Warsaw on 11 July 2013 “hope in the future is weakening” and “public support for political institutions is waning”, not just at the EU level. In these changing circumstances, Barroso, paraphrasing US President John F. Kennedy, demanded from the participants not just to ask “what can Europe do for science and culture, but what can the sciences and culture do for Europe”?

The project began in earnest with the formation of the Cultural Committee. At the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013 the Commission and Bozar discussed its composition. These bilateral negotiations proved to be “bureaucratic and complex” (Interview Dujardin). Both the

Commission including Barroso himself and the Bozar suggested potential members. Neither excellence nor transnational public visibility played a significant role in the final selection. Instead, in typical EU fashion, the Commission sought a balanced representation with an acceptable mix of gender, age and regional and national provenance. With the notable exceptions of the Baltic countries and south-eastern Europe south of Hungary, all sub-regions were represented. However, Michał Kleiber, the President of the Polish Academy of Sciences, was only enlisted after the start of the project.

In one important way the committee's composition was severely unbalanced, however. In fact, it became strongly biased in favour of the (performing) arts, reflecting the interests, preferences and networks of both Barroso and the Bozar and Dujardin. The original project website still talked about giving "artists, intellectuals and scientists a space for long-term discussion and expression about Europe". In the end, however, of the 17 full members only György Konrád, the Hungarian writer and long-time president of the Berlin Academy of Fine Arts, qualified as an "intellectual"; Kleiber was the only scientist; Tomáš Sedláček, a Czech economist and lecturer at Charles University Prague the only academic with a social science background; and Per Nyholm, a Danish journalist coopted on Løkkegaard's suggestion, did not fall into any of the categories used in the project's typology. Other members included, for example, Jonathan Mills, the director of the Edinburgh Festival, and Hortense Archambault, the director of the Avignon Festival, alongside the Icelandic-Danish visual artist Olafur Eliasson and the Spanish sculptor Cristina Iglesias.

Moreover, several members were only active on paper. They attended only one committee meeting or none at all. As an "associate member" the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, for example, effectively pulled out of the Narrative for Europe project after the inaugural meeting in Brussels in April 2013. He was "annoyed" (Interview Meseeuw) not to have been allocated more than five minutes for a convoluted political statement. In it he advocated that the EU

must learn more from China where the communist party pays well for the construction of many buildings designed by him and his company; an idea that, not surprisingly, did not find its way into the committee's declaration issued on 1 March 2014.

Narrative by Declaration?

The budgetary amendment imposed only one obligation on the Cultural Committee: to come up with a “manifesto” for European unity of one kind or another. Moreover, when the Commission advertised the call for tender for the project's administrative implementation including the organization of the general assemblies, it used Løkkegaard's original phrase “a new narrative for Europe”, something that was never officially changed afterwards. In fact, the project website originally claimed boldly that “a new all-encompassing narrative should take into account the evolving reality of the European continent and highlight that the EU is not solely about the economy and growth, but also about cultural unity and common values in a globalized world”. Thus, the Commission initially believed that it would actually be possible to develop *one* “all-encompassing” narrative to legitimize the EU (European Commission 2014a) – contradicting its own well-established rhetoric of “unity in diversity”. The committee members with their divergent views immediately called this idea into question, however. As a result, the Commission quickly changed its informal terminology to “narratives” and, in the final version of the declaration, to “new narrative” – still in the singular, but less obviously so without the indefinite article.

But what kind of narrative was it going to be? Significantly, neither the Commission nor the committee spelled out in a coherent and consensual way at any point during the project what the “old” narrative of Europe had been before the economic and financial crisis. The project website at one point claimed that it was “peace through a common market” (European

Commission 2014a). In his speech in Warsaw on 11 July 2013, however, Barroso also referred to the protection of human rights as a shared objective derived from Europeans' collective experience. Other speakers at the general assemblies included the Polish Prime Minister (and new European Council President since 2014) Donald Tusk in Warsaw and the Italian and Slovene Prime Ministers Enrico Letta and Alenka Bratušek in Milan in November 2013, who invoked yet other dimensions of European narratives old or new.

References to the historical roots of European integration narratives abounded in their speeches and in discussions at the general assemblies. Barroso started each assembly with a fully written lecture and concluded it with a more improvised speech in which he sought to relate to the discussions on the podium. Whereas the prime ministers stayed only for the introduction and their own speeches, Barroso actually followed most of the discussions. Referring to his own experience of the 1974 Carnation revolution in Portugal and to the Solidarność movement in Poland in the early 1980s, he highlighted in his speech in Warsaw that a "wave of freedom" starting in a shipyard in Gdansk "opened the way for the reunification of Europe". He clearly presented these and other historical events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall as transnational and to some extent part of a shared European memory. Tusk on the other hand emphasized the challenge that "Europeans live in the same calendar time, but their historical memory is disassociated". In his Polish perspective, the collective postwar experience was markedly different in Western and Eastern Europe in particular, something that has also been reflected in the European Parliament's memory politics since Eastern enlargement in 2004 discussed in greater detail in Laure Neumayer's article in this special issue, especially concerning the question of comparability of crimes committed by national socialists and fascists and by Stalinists during the twentieth century (Kaiser 2012; Littoz-Monnet 2012; Mõlksoo 2009).

In preparation of parallel workshops on the eve of the general assembly in Milan the Narrative for Europe project actually still emphasized the need for a strong “historical perspective”. The very short paper circulated to participants in advance argued that “a common history is obviously the main source of collective identity for a community”. However, “Europe still lacks a shared history”. As a result, the paper demanded from the participants to create “a common framework of shared stories”. These stories would then foster the convergence of narrative structures and collective memory. Workshop participants should therefore focus on “trying to identify the key elements of both the history of Europe throughout the centuries but also of the recently launched ‘European integration’ as a formal institutionalized and constitutional process initiated by the Second World War”.

But of the eight workshops, only one actually discussed historical aspects, agreeing with the idea in the preparatory document of “three key moments of 1945, 1989, and 2008, and also with 2014, as the new narrative should be clearly a story of our present time”. The Cultural Committee did not discuss historical aspects of the “new narrative” either, and certainly not European history “throughout the centuries”. In fact, Rose Fenton, cultural director of Freeworld, a London-based charity, and Cultural Committee member, declared at the start of the “Macbeth” workshop in Milan that as no historians were present in that particular group, historical dimensions of any new narrative, or narratives, would not be discussed.

The final version of the declaration mixes pleas to strengthen the role of culture in European integration to overcome an allegedly excessive focus on economic and financial issues; standard Commission rhetoric about the EU’s political goals; and shallow and unconnected references to the short-term twentieth century historical experience of war, the end of the Cold War and the economic and financial crisis. It starts off with short references to the contemporary European experience of crisis and its resulting challenges “from youth unemployment to climate change, from immigration to data security”. It goes on to claim that

“Europe is a state of mind” and a form of “identity, an idea, an ideal” as well as a “moral and political responsibility”.

Europe’s evolution to the present day is framed as the result of “students, researchers, scholars, artists, professionals and politicians who live, study, work, think and journey across national borders”. Over time these transnational exchanges have led to the development of “a shared grammar of music and art, a common body of science and philosophy, an astonishing richness of literature and a flourishing network of trades”. While the declaration avoids any reference to collective memory, it does claim that “cultural heritage reveals what it has meant to be a European”, thus providing “a sense of belonging amongst and between European citizens”.

The section “Europe’s evolving narrative” starts with the briefest reference to Europe’s “Jewish, Greco-Roman and Christian foundations” before moving on immediately to three experiences. Having noticed that 2014 marked one hundred years since the start of the First World War, the Cultural Committee broadens the previous exclusive references to 1945 to include the experience of both world wars. The declaration uses quasi-religious language to argue that Europe “lost its soul in the battlefields and the trenches”. Through European integration after 1945, however, its “soul was restored”. The declaration draws on another standard trope when it claims that “the European integration project was born like a phoenix out of the ashes” of the world wars.

This heavily simplified image evokes the idea of the origins of the present-day EU as a total break, or zero hour, in (Western) European history. This Manichaeian worldview of a dark past and the EU as the bright future implicitly denies all continuities in European integration across the world wars, which recent historical scholarship has highlighted. Examples include technology and infrastructure integration and economic and political cooperation, where cartels persisted in the European Coal and Steel Community after 1953 (Kaiser and Schot

2014; Kohlrausch and Trischler 2014). As a result, it also ignores the technocratic and traditional parliamentary conceptions of “supranational” government which informed postwar integration and which are heavily at odds with the European Commission’s more recent pervasive “civil society” rhetoric.

As in the case of the paragraph on the world wars, the declaration’s next section on the year 1989 also does not address the issue of Europeans as perpetrators. Instead, it only refers to the “mobilization of energy, passion and resistance against communist regimes”. Their overthrow then paved the way for a “new era of interconnectedness and interaction amongst people and countries”. The EU, according to the declaration, “provided the visionary framework and the sense of purpose that was necessary in responding to the tremendous challenge of reunifying Europe”.

Having praised the EU in this paragraph about the “fall of the iron curtain” for integrating markets and establishing “the free circulation of people, goods, services and ideas”, the declaration then abruptly proceeds to damn “the dominant narrative of the time [before 2008], with its belief in the self-regulatory capacity of markets and its celebration of profit-seeking speculation”. Whose narrative this was or whether the EU or any of its institutions like the European Commission might have shared such a vision, the declaration does not disclose. It merely talks about the resulting “stronger political governance of the financial system” and an alleged shift to “the joint paradigms of participatory democracy and sustainability”.

In conclusion, finally, the declaration demands a “New Renaissance” for Europe which needs to become “the world champion of sustainable living” advocating both “biodiversity” and “cultural diversity and pluralism” in Europe and beyond. In three short paragraphs it states that the sciences, arts and cultural heritage can and should play a crucial role in meeting Europe’s contemporary and future challenges. According to the declaration they have the

potential to help “develop a new cosmopolitanism for its citizens” in a Europe to be imagined “as one great mega-city interconnected by means of transportation and communication”.

Finally, contributing to “Europe as a political body” “brave, imaginative and enlightened political leaders” should “speak and understand the language of Europe as a political body, animated and energized by culture”; “artists, scientists, educators and journalists, historians and sociologists, entrepreneurs and civil servants” need to “move beyond the comfort of their autonomy to take on new responsibilities”; and citizens should “raise their voices and ... take part in the European public space of debate ... sharing their stories and concerns”.

Culture Clash between two Milieus

The declaration was only drafted in the first three weeks of February 2014, directly after the final meeting on 30 January 2014 of the Cultural Committee before the general assembly in Berlin. In mid-2013 the committee had created an “editorial committee” of three members to prepare a draft “charter”, “declaration” or similarly titled final document. They were Konrad, Nyholm and Sedláček – those committee members with extensive professional writing experience as novelist, journalist and academic and speech-writer respectively. By the time of the general assembly in Milan in November 2013, however, they had submitted three separate competing texts, with Konrad’s an older contribution in German translated into English for this purpose, but no integrated draft. Earlier plans for an editorial committee meeting in the Hungarian writer’s home had come to nothing. In the presence of only Nyholm and Sedláček, the Cultural Committee meeting in Milan degenerated into a disorganized short debate about the drafts, their advantages and downsides. No decision was taken as to how to arrive at the projected declaration. By 30 January 2014, still no draft existed. At this point, the Bozar team was charged with writing it, and it in turn engaged Nicola Setari, who was formally employed

by Teamwork, the French company that had won the tender for the project's practical organisation. His draft drew on some of the ideas in the older texts. It was circulated to the committee members several times at short notice giving them an opportunity to voice any criticism before the final version was sent out on 26 February. The Danish journalist Nyholm immediately distanced himself from the text and refused to endorse the declaration.

The Narrative for Europe project's severe problems and near-failure to deliver any kind of agreed text largely resulted from a clash of cultures between two very different milieus with their own logics and operational modes. The politicians and bureaucrats were primarily interested in garnering public support for the EU and strengthening participation in the 2014 European elections. Thus, the Commission officials were initially extremely rigid in their organisation of the public events at which Barroso participated. In contrast, while the Commission required the promised public statement from the committee at the end of the process, it otherwise did not interfere much in its privately held deliberations.

The Danish MP Løkkegaard was content with participating in the general assemblies and with his passive observer status in the committee. More importantly, the two Commission officials concentrated almost entirely on the efficient organisation of the opening event with the participation of three Commissioners and of the three general assemblies with Barroso and the prime ministers of four EU member states. The Commission originally wanted the three assemblies to take place in Warsaw, Paris and Berlin. The choice of the "Weimar triangle" was motivated by a desire to combine old and new member states, "core Europe" member states with governments with pro-active EU-friendly policies, and major states with a large national public sphere to enhance the project's visibility. In the light of attacks by French cultural elites on the Commission's support for the inclusion of culture in the projected transatlantic EU-US free trade area, however, the French President's office pulled out of the

planned cooperation (Interview Houtman), so that France and Paris were replaced with Italy and Milan as the place of the second general assembly.

The first event in Brussels foresaw an “open debate” after opening statements by Barroso and Commissioners Viviane Reding and Androulla Vassiliou. However, it was nearly entirely staged, with individual participants warned in advance of the meeting to prepare statements on certain topics and “questions” for the “debate” (Interview Sassatelli). The general assembly in Warsaw, too, was rigidly structured with panels chaired by committee members, which went overtime and left practically no space for questions from the floor let alone open discussion. When committee members severely criticized this autocratic and, for the purpose of a bottom-up creation of “a new narrative for Europe”, self-defeating form of organization, Bozar and the Commission invited some 80 participants for eight workshops to precede the general assembly in Milan. At a subsequent dinner, the workshop chairs reported back to Barroso and Dujardin. Before the last general assembly in Berlin, finally, the committee members and participants met in the studio of visual artist Olafur Eliasson, where some of them were invited to make short statements with proposals which led to an incipient debate with the Commission President over dinner. Thus, the Commission’s bureaucratic control became slightly more relaxed over time and the process somewhat more interactive. However, the participants who made short statements at the “informal” dinner event in Berlin were still selected and warned in advance and called up by the chair. In all the other meetings with Barroso over the course of the project, spontaneous exchange of views was equally absent. In contrast, in the private Cultural Committee meetings the Commission officials almost completely refrained from comments other than administrative advice and reminders concerning the need to draft a declaration in a timely manner. They played a passive observer role most of the time despite the fact that the meetings were badly prepared and largely unstructured, with “no discipline, no direction” (Interview Nyholm). In fact, Dujardin

interpreted his own role as a facilitator and moderator only. He never took position on any of the contentious issues, including the crucial question of how to draft the declaration. The Commission officials only insisted on a new approach once it became clear at the committee meeting of 30 January 2014 that the declaration might fail to materialize.

Their otherwise hands-off approach reflects a more widespread attitude among EU institutions towards people from the cultural sphere who are granted a far larger degree of autonomy than other milieus in Brussels policy-making. EU institutions are keenly interested in access to these individuals' cultural capital, which they seek to employ for legitimizing their institutions and policies. At the same time, due to the very limited subsidiary EU powers in cultural policy (Gordon 2010) they have very little to offer them in return, for example in the form of project funding. In the case of the Narrative for Europe project, for example, committee members invested their time unpaid and were only reimbursed for their travel costs.

Moreover, they actually risk their professional reputation as their peers could regard them as colluding with the Commission in what might appear like a superficial propaganda exercise.

The resulting hands-off approach is also visible in other projects such as the House of European History museum in Brussels due to open in 2015, for example (Kaiser et al. 2014).

There, the European Parliament and its administration have largely given the professional team of curators and the advisory board of historians a free reign in preparing the first permanent exhibition – this despite the fact that they have marginalized the key political objective behind the project, that is the museal representation of European integration history, instead turning the museum into one of European political history and everyday culture in the twentieth century.

Reflecting the wide-spread fear in the Commission of being perceived as an autocratic institution, Commission official SÉrvulo Correia insisted that there would be “no editorial interference” in the Narrative for Europe project. This group, she argued, “would not accept

that anyway” (Interview Sérvulo Correia). Her assessment already points to a fundamental characteristic of the majority of the committee members from the cultural milieu. They are fiercely individualistic and, unlike many members of cultural elites in the nineteenth century, strongly allergic to any attempts to instrumentalize them for political and institutional agendas. Thus, Nyholm claims that Konrad already told him after the inaugural meeting in Brussels in April 2013 that in light of the Commission’s bureaucratic handling of the event, the entire process was “a waste of time” (Interview Nyholm). In fact, most committee members placed far greater emphasis throughout their work on the process as opposed to the output, which was the Commission’s primary concern with its goal-oriented attitude. Some were interested in an intellectual debate about Europe. Others, like the Dutch architect Koolhaas, in a platform for airing their views. No-one had a strong interest in the projected declaration itself. This partly explains the chaotic nature of the committee proceedings, the submission of three competing draft texts and the inability of the committee as a whole to substantially influence the outcome to which most signed up after the declaration was drafted and subsequently presented to Barroso and Merkel in Berlin on 1 March 2014.

In addition, however, the committee members had been chosen for their nationality, gender and professional status, among other criteria, but not for their views on Europe. In Nyholm’s assessment (Interview Nyholm), many of them were surprisingly apolitical and more interested in promoting their own artistic production than in Europe: “They can talk about ballet and preserving castles ... but not about preserving our democracies.” In as much as their political preferences for Europe and the EU became clear during the committee proceedings, they reached from Nyholm’s ardent federalism and advocacy of a strong EU defence policy and force to Fenton’s general support for the notion of Europe as a larger civilizational identity, but strong aversion to anything federalist in tone or substance. Her fear of being seen as contributing to a Commission-instigated federalist plot might also have

derived from her position as heading a small nationally-based charity in a member state with a fiercely Eurosceptic media and public. In addition to the committee members' focus on the process, not the output, their fundamental disagreements over the future of Europe and the EU also made it impossible for them to come up with a coherent text for the declaration.

Crucially, individual committee members who could bridge both milieus in the end exercised a disproportionate influence on the project outcome. These were the members with a background in culture who represent cultural interest groups in Brussels. Thus, Kathrin Deventer, the German director of the European Festivals Association, succeeded in linking the Narrative for Europe project to the long-standing initiative, "A Soul for Europe", which organized an impressive conference in Berlin on 3 March 2014 with all candidates for the European Commission presidency. Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailovic, the secretary general of Europa Nostra, the pan-European organisation for cultural heritage, strongly opposed Nyholm's position on the committee and supported putting Bozar and Setari in charge of drafting the declaration which she subsequently supported enthusiastically. She also replaced Dujardin at the final assembly in Berlin when he literally lost his voice and could not moderate the event.

These lobbyists, crucially, understood the logics and operational modes of the political-bureaucratic *and* the cultural milieus and managed to mediate between both. They also had the strongest interest among the committee members in a positive outcome in the form of a declaration of acceptable quality and the prolongation of the project beyond 2014, as it could potentially bring significant benefits for their organisations in the form of additional political capital and some funding. In other words, they had a far greater interest than other committee members in the exchange of cultural and political capital with the Commission and the European Parliament.

Conclusion

The Narrative for Europe project, like the House of European History, is only one of many initiatives at EU level to work towards greater transnational convergence of individual and collective memory in Europe (see e.g. Littoz-Monnet 2012). As the EU's "output" and "input" legitimacy appear to be in decline, many policy-makers in Brussels hope that greater cultural integration can provide a stronger foundation for its economic and political integration. The EU's cultural initiatives have, as a result, often reacted to crises. Arguably, the origins of the EU's cultural policy in the 1970s were in part a response to the socio-economic crisis after 1973 (Sassatelli 2009; Littoz-Monnet 2007; Theiler 2005). The so-called Reflection Group "The Spiritual and Cultural Dimension of Europe" initiated by the then Commission President Romano Prodi in 2002 reflected the dual concern about the institution's own legitimacy after its 1999 crisis and about Europe's relationship with Islam and the Muslim world after the attacks of September 11, 2001. The Narrative for Europe project and its highly presentist agenda, finally, mark a reaction to the economic and financial crisis since 2008 and the EU's related apparently deepening legitimacy crisis.

While forms of transnationalizing cultural discourses and representations in Europe are often initiated from below, responding to actual societal challenges and changes (Kaiser et al. 2014: 1-13), the Narrative for Europe project is an example of what Cris Shore (2000) has analyzed as top-down attempts at nation- and polity-building. At Berlin the Danish MEP Løkkegaard claimed that "culture has broken its silence ... and decided to act". In reality, however, the European Parliament and Commission President Barroso organized a few representatives from the cultural sphere in a neo-corporatist manner into a dysfunctional group of individualists who neither shared a strong interest in writing "a new narrative for Europe" nor managed to agree on its direction and content. Crucially, the project failed to connect with

earlier initiatives like the work of Prodi's Reflection Group, or to learn from the failures of older cultural projects such as the EU-sponsored attempt by the French historian Jean-Baptiste Duroselle (1990) to write a long-term European integration narrative, which was severely criticized at the time for its tendentious teleological character (Calligaro 2013: 57-67; Varsori 2010). The Narrative for Europe project's haphazard organization thus points to a lack of institutional memory among EU institutions and an inability to construct "narratives" of European integration in a consistent manner over time and space – a precondition for their successful dissemination and long-term impact on transnational European memory.

In addition, the Commission's targeting of large member states and the Narrative for Europe project's inability to disseminate its message more fully across the entire EU highlights the continued limits on the active construction of transnational narratives with potential to contribute to a greater convergence of European memory and identity (Risse 2010; Quenzel 2005; Eder 2001). These limits result from the absence of a continuously constituted and reconstituted common public sphere. In Europe for the moment a transnational public sphere only forms temporarily through crises (Meyer 2010; Trenz 2002). Thus, to give but one example, the terrorist attack on the French satirical journal *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015 and the pan-European reaction to and debate about it has infinitely greater potential for clarifying and reinforcing shared norms and values than a declaration by members of a committee of a few people from the cultural sphere.

Drafted under enormous time pressure, the "narrative" that did emerge in the form of the declaration moreover was neither cohesive nor especially well-written. It mixed references to the importance of culture with shallow historical arguments and standard Commission rhetoric about European norms and values. The absence of a long-term historical perspective, which is characteristic of national integration narratives formed in the nineteenth century and was requested in the preparatory document for the general assembly in Milan, is not just

explained by the absence of historians from the committee. Such historical references are far more contentious now than they were after the Second World War, especially any connections between European integration and the Christian heritage which is at odds with the prevailing inclusive political discourse. But the resulting emphasis on the war experience, the fall of the iron curtain and bizarrely (as it concerns the most recent past which is difficult to assess in terms of its long-term impact), the economic and financial crisis does not make for a cohesive narrative. This is especially true as the declaration makes no attempt at all to *connect* them – the very essence of a narrative that seeks to make sense of the present day through linking past events and experiences in an apparently logical chronology. In addition to their contentious nature, moreover, the Commission and the Cultural Committee members may also have refrained from long-term historical references to antiquity, Christian “unity” or the ideas and norms of the Enlightenment because they are far less intelligible for EU citizens, especially youngsters, than they used to be for European elites with a classical (school) education.

Some of the declaration’s deficiencies as a text could perhaps have been avoided through a different process. Thus, Nyholm has suggested in retrospect that it would have been better to “shut up three to five intelligent people in a hotel for two weeks to come up with a draft” (Interview Nyholm). As participant Mary McCarthy remarked laconically at the Macbeth workshop in Milan in November 2013, “one cannot write brilliant documents by committee”. And as Konrad insisted in the discussion in Berlin “it is perfectly impossible to write a narrative on three or four pages”. In fact, narratives develop over long periods of time and only become progressively embedded in public discourses, literature and education, for example, before they can have substantial impact on individual and collective memory. One public statement like the declaration reported in some German media is hardly sufficient for fundamentally changing existing narratives, whatever they may be.

Whether the EU actually needs a new narrative, is of course an altogether different, normative issue. In fact, the German Chancellor Merkel caricatured the Commission's top-down quest for such a new narrative in her speech in Berlin. Having grown up in the former communist East Germany, she actually claimed in her speech that the European integration objectives of "peace, freedom and prosperity ... are as relevant as ever". Did Europeans really, the German chancellor asked provocatively, "long for a new master narrative", or would they prefer a forum where they "can tell their own stories about Europe?"

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