Narratives of integration.
A holistic approach to European legitimacy

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DISSEMINATION LEVEL
Public
Narratives of integration. A holistic approach to European legitimacy

Work Package 14 – Deliverable 2

Due date: 31.10.2021
Submission date: 29.10.2021
Lead beneficiary: GDA
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Abstract
This working paper develops a holistic approach to the legitimation of the European Union, in the light of the distance between citizens’ perceptions of the European project and the existing norms and institutions. The aim is to contribute to a comprehensive examination of principles, practices, and perceptions of the EU, relating to both the polity and policy levels. The analysis starts from the acknowledgement that the EU’s legitimacy is contested and that there is a plurality of critiques and justifications for the European project. The aim is to provide a first step by recognizing and describing (or mapping) existing significant diversity, and identify tensions, critiques, as well as affinities, and, ultimately, indicate potential ‘bridges’ or compromises. The second, more difficult step, will be made in a successive working paper, which seeks to develop a new narrative for the European integration process, and which reflects both institutional and societal narratives of the European project.
1. Introduction

This working paper develops a holistic approach\(^1\) to the legitimation of the European Union, in the light of the distance between citizens’ perceptions of the European project and the existing norms and institutions. The aim is to contribute to a comprehensive examination of principles, practices, and perceptions of democracy and the rule of law in the EU, regarding both the polity and policy levels, as the RECONNECT project sets out to do. The analysis starts from the observation and acknowledgement that the EU’s legitimacy is contested and that there is a plurality of critiques and justifications for the European project (cf. De Wilde 2021/RECONNECT Deliverable 14.3). Plurality involves different (collective) actors, with different visions, agendas, and expectations concerning the EU, including member states and their traditions and domestic contexts; political actors both within member states and on the EU level; civil society actors both within member states and on the transnational level. In addition, there is a plurality of ‘spheres of justification’, regarding in particular the processes of economic integration, political integration, legal integration, in which different principles of justification play a role.\(^2\)

While the EU is widely understood to be based on a consensus on fundamental values\(^3\) (cf. Lenaerts 2020) - as enshrined in article 2 TEU since the Lisbon Treaty -, such fundamental values are of a highly abstract kind (and hence are open to interpretation in variegating ways, while having the tendency to be relatively distant from everyday concerns of ordinary people). A key challenge – for which a holistic approach seeks to provide at least some answers – is to identify and reconcile a ‘really existing’ multiplicity of understandings, perceptions, criticisms, and expectations regarding the European project. In this working paper, therefore, the aim is to provide a first step by recognizing and describing (or mapping) significant diversity, and identify contrasting principles, perceptions, visions, and critiques, and, ultimately, indicate potential affinities, ‘bridges’ or compromises. The second, more difficult step, will be made in a successive working paper (Deliverable 14.4) which seeks to develop a new narrative for the European integration process.

The working paper is structured as follows. It starts with a brief discussion of legitimacy, stressing the importance of both normative and sociological or societal legitimacy for the European project. Subsequently, the analysis of narratives will be introduced, as a valuable and effective approach to study different visions of the European Union, based on the prioritization of specific higher principles or

\(^{1}\) Here, holism is understood in terms of a comprehensive or systematic approach to claims of legitimacy regarding the European integration project. The holistic approach aims at describing or ‘mapping’ a range of (the most) prominent and competing claims of legitimacy in relation to the European Union.

\(^{2}\) The analysis considers various results from the RECONNECT project, as well as the responses to an internal questionnaire on legitimacy.

\(^{3}\) The article 2 values emerged with the Lisbon Treaty and are not free from ambiguity, see Wouters 2020.

\(^{4}\) A good example of such relative distance regards human rights, as exemplified in a recent large-scale survey with citizens undertaken by the EU’s Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA 2019). In its report (2019: 6), the FRA states:

The EU is founded on the values of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights. However, these values can seem remote in people’s daily lives. The subject of this report, ‘fundamental rights’ – which, in itself, is a particular term for ‘human rights’ in the internal context of the EU, and therefore difficult to explain to non-experts – is an abstract term for most people.
principles of justification (which relate in different ways to specific forms of legitimation, such as the frequently invoked ‘input’, output’, and ‘throughput’ forms\(^5\)), and containing distinctive perspectives on the future development of the European Union. Third, the importance of creative imagination and analysis of existing critiques on the European integration project is discussed, underlining the importance of recognizing and exploring critical and radical perspectives that potentially stem from non-institutional, societal actors. Fourth, a representative, even if not exhaustive range of European narratives is discussed, in terms of core principles of justification, key conflicts identified, perceptions of citizen engagement with EU decision-making, and perceptions of the future of European integration. Fifth, four of the five\(^6\) areas of governance and policy-making as researched by RECONNECT - macroeconomic and fiscal governance, trade policy, migration, and counter-terrorism - will be briefly discussed in terms of legitimacy, main tensions and conflicts, and citizen perceptions. Finally, in the concluding remarks, key legitimacy deficits, as well as room for compromise and ‘overlapping consensus’ will be discussed.

2. Legitimacy

As it is the case with democracies on the national level, the European Union is affected by contested political legitimacy, and even a decline in some specific forms of legitimacy (for instance, the EU as a peace project or the EU as a provider of economic wellbeing (‘output legitimacy’), cf. Sternberg 2013; 2020; Outhwaite 2010: 280). As argued by Claudia Sternberg, following Pierre Rosanvallon, a general trend from the 1980s onwards is that the democratic state was heavily affected by a sustained loss in two traditional forms of legitimacy, that is, electoral legitimacy (legitimacy through the ballot box) and bureaucratic legitimacy (Weber’s formal-procedural type) (Sternberg 2021: 2). For the EU, it was by the 1970s, and more prominently in the wake of the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, that democratic dimensions became a significant issue of contestation. For the EU and its democratic deficit (see Blokker et al. 2021/RECONNECT Deliverable 14.1), an additional complexity is hence that in the historical period in which democratic legitimacy became an issue for the EU, it had equally become a problematic dimension in established, national democracies.

The formal-procedural and bureaucratic type of legitimacy, closely related to the idea of legality, and of great relevance for the early years of European integration-through-law and bureaucracy, is dramatically insufficient in times of accumulative crises and increased politicization of the European project. As one observer puts it, one could give the EU ‘10 points for legality (or maybe 9 to allow for endemic financial irregularities) but only 3 or 4 for legitimacy’ (Outhwaite 2010: 279). While indeed ‘legality is the EU’s essence’ (Outhwaite 2010: 279), the fact of formal legality (and in some ways de facto constitutional arrangements) is far from adequate to provide the EU with a robust and

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\(^5\) By way of example, the neoliberal narrative as discussed below emphasizes output legitimacy – mainly through the market principle - in terms of growth and efficiency, while approaching input legitimacy largely as individual freedom of choice. Other narratives contain different combinations of input and output legitimacy.

\(^6\) The project further analyses the current Covid-19 pandemic; at the time of writing, there were not yet sufficient materials available to include this field into the analysis in a meaningful way.
straightforward basis for legitimation, either in relatively uncontested higher normative principles or in wider European societies’ perceptions of and support for the European project.

In this working paper, which seeks to identify key competing narratives of legitimacy of the European project, it will be stressed that the normative legitimacy incorporated in the higher principles and values that underpin the EU (as most famously codified in article 2 TEU), grounded in universal values and rational, foundational norms, cannot be understood as detached from sociological or societal legitimacy, that is, the grounding of formal-legal norms and institutions in pre-existing societal orientations and positive societal motivations (Thornhill and Ashenden 2010: 9). As argued by Justus Schönlau, stressing the importance of diversifying between normative, objective qualities and (inter-)subjective ones:

the (inter-) subjective, cognitive element of the legitimacy concept means that the question of whether there is a legitimacy problem depends as much on how people perceive the system, as it does on objective qualities or deficiencies of the system. The notion of the EU’s ‘deficit’ of legitimacy suggests that the legitimacy available to the Union is insufficient in the eyes of the public to justify its operation, its further development, or even its existence, at a given point in time (Schönlau 2005: 38).

Legitimacy is not given once and for all and that the European integration project has seen important changes and shifts in the construction as well as contestation of legitimacy (Sternberg 2021: 2; cf. Brunkhorst 2016; Schönlau 2005: 39). As Sternberg has argued, ‘political legitimacy is an “essentially contested concept” if there ever was one’ and ‘[i]t is an issue that can never be resolved conclusively’ (2013: 4). In fact, ‘[n]everending discursive contests take place (a) what it takes for political authority to be legitimate and (b) how to make sense of the particular instance of political authority at hand’ (Sternberg 2013: 4). Nevertheless, as is also central to the RECONNECT project, it needs to be recognized that legitimacy is essential to a viable functioning of European democracy:

A certain degree of legitimacy in the eyes of those subjected to political power is indispensable if this power is to be exercised efficiently and find compliance without coercion, costly and unsustainable in the long run (Sternberg 2013: 5).

In the case of the EU, the legitimacy problem is particularly acute, because it regards the ‘very establishment of the EU polity’, which is a ‘political system [that] was built from scratch’ (Sternberg 2013: 5). In this regard, the EU has from its early days been subject to structural tensions and contests over legitimacy in terms of a ‘balancing act between bringing the people in and keeping them out (or from obstructing integration)’ (Sternberg 2013: 187) (see Figure 1). Historically, the European project drew legitimacy from the ideas that there was no alternative to supranational integration of some kind in order to secure piece and socio-economic well-being throughout Europe (Sternberg 2013: 188). Democracy and citizen participation did not form significant parts of the early years of integration, even if strong statements in favour had been made, also by key figures such as Altiero Spinelli (1957). Instead, European integration ‘was very much the embodiment of … [a] non-electoral, bureaucratic type of legitimacy’ (Sternberg 2021: 7), grounded in a permissive consensus. The core of this type of legitimacy – in Weberian fashion - consisted in the imaginary that ‘good and legitimate government was
government that was effective in solving concrete problems, professional, impartial, predictable as in following clear procedures’ (Sternberg 2021: 8).

**Figure 1: Shifting legitimacy of the European project**

![Shifting legitimacy of the EU](image)

Source: Based on Sternberg 2013; Schönau 2005; own elaborations.

One way of beginning to understand the legitimacy deficit of the EU is the reconstruction of the insufficient legitimatory power of merely formal-legal forms of legitimacy, and the investigating of additional forms of legitimate authority. The latter are frequently part of competing claims, visions, and imaginations of the European project (cf. Sternberg 2021: 3). The analysis of competing claims and narratives will provide us with insights in propositions of legitimacy that reflect available sociological forms (and hence may indicate which forms of institutionalised legitimacy might provoke societal support). In other words, competing narratives contain a variety of propositions of what renders the EU a legitimate endeavour. Third, the importance of considering and analysing of radical narratives and critiques will be stressed, underlining the importance of creative imagination for the ongoing discussion of the future of Europe. Fourth, in the main part of the paper, six different ‘polity’ narratives of European integration will be outlined (selected on the basis of existing literature as well as prominent policy and political documents), identifying key principles of justification (such as market integration, legal integration and the rule of law, non-domination, solidarity, national sovereignty, and democratic participation). The narratives are briefly reconstructed on the basis of key principles, understandings of citizen engagement, main conflicts identified, and understandings of the future of the integration project. Fifth, so-called ‘policy narratives’ will be discussed, on the basis of RECONNECT research in four areas of governance and policy-making. Finally, in the concluding remarks, the significance of the recognition of plurality and tensions between higher principles will be stressed (in particular in relation to the Conference on the Future of Europe) and preliminary suggestions will be made for ‘bridging’ discourses and for identifying possibilities for an ‘overlapping consensus’ between contrasting narratives.

3. A Narrative Approach

Plurality with regard to the understanding and justification of European integration is evident (see also Blokker et al. 2021/RECONNECT Deliverable 14.1; De Wilde 2021/RECONNECT Deliverable 14.3; Nicolaïdis and Pélabay 2009). In fact, Europe could be understood as a ‘narrative laboratory’ (Eder and Carlson 2020: 102). A convincing meta-narrative of the European Union needs to identify as well as accommodate different viewpoints, key conflicts, indicating potential room for compromise. Hence, a starting point needs to be a systematic analysis of existing collective ‘stories’ of European integration, which provide meaning and which indicate the finalité as well as future trajectory of the EU. An increasingly utilized approach to study meaning-making regarding European integration is narrative
analysis. In fact, the scholarly analysis of European integration has witnessed something of a ‘narrative turn’ in recent years (Bouza García 2017a; Cloet 2017; Lueg and Carlson 2020). As argued by one prominent scholar in narrative analysis, ‘[i]t is only from the moment that the EU started to be conceived as a polity needing to be in touch with its citizens – roughly in the early 90s with the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty and the creation of European citizenship – that scholars of the EU started to reflect on whether and how the EU can justify its existence directly to the peoples for Europe’ (Bouza García 2017a: 286). Frequently, the increased need for a legitimatory narrative of the EU is related to the decline of the so-called permissive consensus and the increasing politicization of the EU as its result. This also means that the traditional dual legitimation for the European project – peace and rationalization – does not persuade the European public anymore (Sternberg 2021).

Narratives of European integration are of significance for our concern of reconnecting citizens with the European project for various reasons. First, narratives function as vehicles of meaning-making and hence official, strategic narratives of the EU need to encompass in some way the understandings and perceptions of ordinary citizens if such narratives want to resonate with, or even to convince, citizens (Bouza García 2017a). This includes both the need for involving different people and groups with (sometime starkly) different political subjectivities and it assumes something more than a purely passive stance by citizens. In fact, ‘whether or not people are willing to engage in argumentation depends (partly) on the narratives they take for granted and through which they convey their positions. Stories create different subjectivities, which, in turn, account for why some people are more open than others to counter-arguments and counter-stories’ (Forchtner, Engelken and Eder 2018: 202). Second, narratives provide specific accounts of legitimacy and justification of the European project (Schneider et al. 2010; Sternberg 2013) and consist in articulations of ‘political projects’ (Bouza García 2017b: 287). In this regard, it can be demonstrated that the European project has seen historical shifts in terms of forms of legitimacy (Sternberg 2013; 2020). Third, narratives draw attention to the ongoing nature of the construction of the European Union as well as to the pluralism and potentially contrasting visions of the European project. Fourth, narratives tend to provide an ideal understandings or imaginations of what the EU ought to look like and hence provide depictions of potential futures (in this regard, the mapping of narratives is useful in the context of European debates on its future, such as with the current Conference on the Future of Europe). Fifth, in a related manner, narratives (just as ideologies, a closely related concept) contain elements of imagination and hence provide starting points for rethinking the European project.

The objective in this working paper is to develop a holistic approach to the disconnection between citizens/society and the EU in terms of the legitimacy and of justification of European integration. The focus is what could be called ‘grand narratives’ (as, for instance, expressed in the Narrative Policy

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7 Narratives are being used in this working paper as inter-subjective understandings and stories of the European integration project, which articulate principles of justification, visions of the origins and the future of the project, as well as perceive specific core conflicts. As such, the notion of narratives understood as collective stories has affinity with the notion of political ideology (a structured political set of ideas), that of discourse (a system of meaning-making and ideas as expressed in language), and that of frames (ways of approaching/”framing” specific issues, problems or conflicts). The working paper will mostly use narrative and at times (in a rather interchangeable manner) discourse.
Framework (NPF), one of the approaches that influences our approach here, cf. Shanahan et al. 2018), meta-narratives, or what we will label here ‘polity narratives’. Such narratives ‘create socially constructed realities that manifest as institutions, society, and cultural norms’ and function to ‘explain events, constructing meaning of events or ideas through shared cultural knowledge’ (Shanahan et al. 2018: 195). Narratives in this sense are closely related to the idea of political ideologies in that they provide representations which allow individuals to make sense of and connect to or engage with collective systems (Eagleton: 1979: 78). In the EU context, the polity narratives discussed are those that clearly reflect ideological and more comprehensive political positions on the past, present, and future of the EU, in terms of the EU’s finalité, conceptions of a political community, and the identification of distinctive priority mechanisms of integration (such as the market, law, solidarity, identity, or participation). Narrators of these different polity narratives are frequently institutional ‘entrepreneurs’, but narratives may also be constructed from below. The polity narratives discussed below (section 5) contain the following dimensions: 1) some form of definition of the EU as a polity; 2) the identification of a key mechanism of integration; 3) a specific understanding of the relation between law and politics, with distinctive emphases on the primacy of one sphere over the other; 4) the promotion of a distinctive (set of) higher values or principles of justification (including the law, the market/doux commerce’, non-domination, sovereignty, solidarity, participation), and 5) distinctive understandings of openness or closure of the polity to societal and citizen input.

The working paper wants to contribute to a comprehensive mapping of available, significant, and relatively visible public ‘polity’ narratives, to investigate narratives both in their institutional guise and in a bottom-up societal guise (cf. Bouza García 2017b), and to start identifying major affinities as well as tensions between narratives. The attempt is also to diversify the relation between polity and policy narratives. The ultimate aim is (as will be the objective of a succeeding working paper, deliverable 14.4) to formulate a comprehensive new narrative of European integration. This is an exercise that has surely already been engaged in (see EC 2014), but the endeavour here will differ, in that it will identify key components of a plurality of institutional and societal discourses, in an attempt to come to a more widely acceptable narrative which nevertheless engages with the key conflicts and problems of European integration, as systematically identified in the RECONNECT project. As argued by Carlson and Luege (2020: 4), a ‘narrative can represent powerful mental models that are being fought about socially’. The effort here consists in an attempt to (re-)connect institutional and societal narratives, but also to find some middle ground between highly Eurosceptical counternarratives (cf. McMahon and Kaiser 2021) and largely pro-European ones. In some ways, we will be following Nicolaïdis and Pélabay’s appraisal of ‘narrative diversity’ and their idea of ‘A Europe of “reasonable pluralism”’ (Nicolaïdis and Pélabay 2009), and propose a singular but at the same time pluralist European narrative. According to Nicolaïdis and Pélabay, ‘we need to understand and to talk about the EU in a way which respects the numerous narratives, imagined representations, desires, fears and needs which underpin what must remain a minimal trans-national consensus’ (Nicolaïdis and Pélabay 2009). They continue: ‘we need to ask whether the dominant cognitive maps of the EU in different member states or amongst different sections of European populations are indeed still compatible – ‘overlapping’ – and if so increasingly or

8 On the importance of ideologies beyond the nation-state and for the European project in particular, see White 2020.
decreasingly so. To bring Rawls one level of governance upwards, can we think of the EU as an ‘overlapping consensus of overlapping consensuses’?

In the mapping and brief analysis in section 5, the emphasis will in the first part be on grand, polity narratives which prioritize distinctive general principles (e.g. economic growth and competitive dynamism, democratic self-government, or the rule of law) and narrate a specific past, present, and future for the European project. The polity narratives themselves will be differentiated in those narratives that are largely institutional, and those that emerge more distinctively from society, those that are closer to legitimating the status quo and those that take a more critical view on European integration and may endorse more critical, radical changes. As elaborated in Table 1 below, narratives defending the status quo can be understood as more closely related to the formal institutions, while critical, alternative narratives tend to stem from societal, less-institutionalized forces, which imagine alternatives beyond the existing institutional landscape. Subsequently, we will relate the polity narratives to specific policy fields as analysed in the RECONNECT project (section 6).

Table 1: Narratives on European integration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status quo</th>
<th>Institutional narratives</th>
<th>Societal narratives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pro-integration narratives</td>
<td>Critical, alternative narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation/reproduction</td>
<td>Creativity/imagination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration.

4. Alternative narratives and creative imagination

The European integration project appears as largely the ‘hostage’ of a formal, institutional and in part state-driven imagination, with an emphasis on existing achievements and the status quo. In other words, perceptions of the integration project and the imagination of possible futures seem to a large extent harnessed in visions that take as the point of the departure classical ideas of

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9 Surely, as will be indicated below, this distinction cannot be neatly made. Nevertheless, it is salient to highlight differences between institutional/strategic dimensions of narratives (often focussing on formal politics and horizontal relations between institutions, and frequently controlled by political and other elite actors) and societal dimensions (in which the emphasis is on societal involvement and vertical relations between institutions and wider society, and where the narrative is more frequently produced and controlled by collective and individual actors in civil society, including public intellectuals).

10 The White Paper on the Future of Europe (2017), produced by then Head of the Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, is an example of a ‘middle of the road’ imaginative approach. In particular, the White paper emphasises economic scenarios, prioritising an economic and in some instances neoliberal narrative, but hardly a political one. As Dan Rodrik has argued, the White Paper ‘sidesteps the central challenge that the EU must confront and overcome. If European democracies are to regain their health, economic and political integration cannot remain out of sync. Either political integration catches up with economic integration, or economic integration needs to be scaled back. As long as this decision is evaded, the EU will remain dysfunctional’ (Rodrik 2017: 2).
intergovernmentalism and state sovereignty, and that adhere to the key institutional narratives promoting the status quo, as developed in the next section. As for instance Jiří Přibáň has indicated, the European Union remains deeply steeped in an understanding grounded in a politico-theological understanding of sovereignty (Přibáň 2017). It can even be argued that intergovernmentalism and state centrism, in contrast to the deepening of supranational integration, have become more apparent and widely shared in recent years, not least in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Current developments around the Conference on the Future of Europe – a collective and ostensibly citizen-driven attempt at imagining the future of the integration project – clearly show the weight and prominence of state- and sovereignty-driven perceptions of the European project.¹¹

One of the objectives of this working paper is to draw attention to the importance of studying critique and, in this, potentially identifying radical, creative forms of imagination (‘thinking out of the box’). Such creative thinking often stems more from the margins of political debate, rather than from the institutional centre. ‘Radical’ is understood here as the capacity to think beyond the current situation and its rootedness in distinctive, unquestioned core imaginaries, such as ‘national sovereignty’, ‘representative democracy’, or ‘economic growth’. As Gunther Teubner has argued with regard to transnational regimes, the ‘most radical contestation’ can be expected from ‘outsiders’, that is, social and protest movements, NGOs, and other civil society actors that experience negative effects of transnational regimes (Teubner 2018: S17; cf. Anderson 2013, 2014). As further argued by Teubner, it would be difficult to fully identify such actors with a transnational demos in the sense of the traditional idea of pouvoir constituant. Rather, such civil society actors predominantly engage in what could be called a pouvoir irritant or what others have referred to as destituent power (Patberg 2018; Möller 2018). As Teubner also indicates, those actors that tend to be closer to, or part of, the regime, tend to be less radical in their demands (and less creative in their imagination, one might add). It should however also be acknowledged, that many transnational collective actors in the European context do engage with a positive constituent dimension.

Radical imagination in this regard means a collective, social process, which in particular social actors such as social movements and civil society organizations may be well-placed to stimulate. Social movements’ raison d’être is often deeply grounded in the idea that radical change is needed: ‘social movements inherently envision and seek to bring about a fundamental change in the way society is reproduced’ (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014: 15). Hence, social movement’s activities – including collective discussion and deliberation as well as activities that are aimed at informing and persuading the public at large – are focussed at sparking the imagination, a ‘cultivation of common imaginary landscapes’ (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014: 14). For imaginative views of European integration to emerge, it is crucial to recognize that current institutions and practices are problematic and need significant change.

¹¹ As becomes clear from the non-paper of 12 EU member states on the Conference on the Future of Europe (Non-Paper 2021), in which they argued against any legal obligations stemming from the Conference, see ‘EU’s dirty dozen pour cold water on Conference on Future of Europe’, 23 March, 2021, Financial Times as well as from the Joint Declaration of (radical) right-wing forces in July 2021 (discussed below).
Potential for a new narrative of integration, and related significant change, lies, on one hand, in the possibilities for the articulation of creative ideas and alternative understandings of current practices and institutions. On the other hand, however, such ideas and perceptions need to find both practical implementation, and hence forms of institutional reception, and even more importantly, need to be based on a political, constituent underpinning of processes of institutional articulation as a means of robust legitimation.

5. Narratives of Europe

The accumulation of crises in recent years, the persistent emergence of resistance to integration, and an increased politicization of the EU (cf. De Wilde and Trenz 2012) have put the contested nature of European integration and its future in stark relief. In general, critical standpoints – often labelled ‘Euroscepticism’ or populism – are frequently dismissed by institutions and elites. As for instance Ursula von der Leyen, president of the Commission, stated in Zagreb in 2019: ‘We will never let the nationalists and the populists, who want to divide and destroy the European Union, hijack what our European way of life means’.12 Her predecessor, Manuel Barroso, made a similar statement in 2012: ‘We must not allow the populists and the nationalists to set a negative agenda. I expect all those who call themselves Europeans to stand up and to take the initiative in this debate. Because even more dangerous than the scepticism of the anti-Europeans, is the indifference or the pessimism of the pro-Europeans’.13 As a matter of fact, the way the EU currently moves forward seems in many ways closer to the call for a ‘Europe of the Peoples’ and state-driven forms of sovereigntism than to the radical calls for democratization, the development of strong programmes of social and environmental justice, and the need for the abandonment of neoliberal recipes. As a matter of fact, the latter forms of ‘progressivism’ have a hard time receiving attention from European elites and institutions.

The complexity of the European integration process, despite an at times notable simplification in political communication such as around the issue of Brexit, means that there are various, contrasting perceptions of integration, many of which cannot be outrightly dismissed as wrong. Some of the main discourses on European integration are part of the mythical origins of the project, notably federal, (ordo-) liberal, and Christian-democratic ideas (cf. White 2020; Invernizzi Accetti 2020) and are to various degrees close to the EU institutions (or, as Invernizzi Accetti argues, the institutions reflect distinctive concepts and ideas that can be related to specific ideologies). Others have been gaining ground over time, such as the discourse of participatory democracy (as in particular promoted by civil society organizations), and recently different forms of Euroscepticism, and in a related sense, forms of populism, which need, however, to be deconstructed to be fully understandable. To make sense of contemporary political debates and conflicts, not least as reflected in institutional and contrasting societal narratives need to be distinguished. Such narratives regard European integration and the future of the European project, and include singular positions, political discourses that relate to these positions, and narratives that articulate views of the past, present, and future of European integration. The European project is understood in different ways in distinctive political discourses about its nature.

13 See https://ec.europa.eu/soteu2012/.
Political discourses and narratives provide a relatively stable and ideologically coherent vision of the European project (e.g. liberalism, federalism, or socialism-leftism). To tease out the telos of such discourses, and the specific solutions proposed to Europe’s multiple crises, discourses can be grasped in the form of narratives, that is, accounts of the origins, historical development and future of the European integration project.

A distinction can be made regarding political discourses on European integration (also of significant relevance for the current debate on the Future of Europe), is between ‘prosaic’ and ‘imaginative’ positions. Prosaic positions take the existing situation largely for granted, and do not question key components/institutions/actors or relationships between them. Such positions tend to identify positively with the trajectory and achievements of the EU so far, and to propose ways of consolidating the EU as it is. Imaginative accounts, instead, imagine a different situation, in which European integration might be something rather different from what it is now. A further difference may be identified between ‘reformist’ and ‘radical’ positions (cf. Boltanski and Chiapello 2005), where a reformist position indicates a stance that wants to change the existing policies, but not in comprehensive fashion, that is, not questioning the entire institutional make-up. A radical position, in contrast, wants to change the institutional constellation and the overall framework, imagining a radically different one in its stead\(^1\) (see Table 2).

### Table 2: Classifying European narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reformist</th>
<th>Radical</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prosaic</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example</strong> Solving the current problems by promoting re-invigorated policies (such as a Green policy, Migration policy, Rule of Law monitoring or a deepening of the Single Market)</td>
<td><strong>Example</strong> Solving problems by proposing a significantly different functioning or novel calibration of the institutions, or by instituting new institutions or policies (for instance, creating new institutions or policies, but within the existing technocratic mindset, such as a European fiscal union).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Imaginative</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example</strong> Experimenting in policy-making, for instance, by allowing for significant citizen input/engagement (as might be the case in the Conference on the Future of Europe).</td>
<td><strong>Example</strong> Adopting a structurally novel approach to European integration in order to significantly change the equilibrium of powers, by significantly shifting power away from existing institutions towards other collective actors, such as by means of the institutionalization of citizens’ input (e.g. a permanent citizens’ citizens assembly).</td>
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Source: Author’s elaboration.

The diverse and often contrasting political discourses and narratives on Europe have been identified by various scholars (e.g. Ian Manners identifies ‘communitarian’, ‘cosmopolitan’, and ‘cosmopolitical’

\(^1\) A slightly different, but related, way of categorizing narratives is by identifying their capacity to stimulate processes of collective learning or to block such processes (Forchtner, Engelken Jorge and Eder 2020: 201).
understandings, Manners 2013; Volker Balli identifies ‘ethnonationalism’, ‘European multilevel identity’, ‘Constitutional civic Europeanism’, ‘European consumer polity’, ‘Situated Euro-republicanism’ and ‘Europe of diversity and inconsistency’, Balli 2003; Kalypso Nicolaïdis investigates the -isms of federalism, cosmopolitanism and constitutionalism, Nicolaïdis 2020). The polity narratives briefly discussed here, that is, the rule of law, neoliberalism, federalism, right-wing conservatism, leftism, and participatory democracy have been selected on the basis of existing literature (inter alia Blokker 2017; Müller 2011; Nicolaïdis 2020; Patberg 2020; Sternberg 2013; Trenz and Wilde 2012; White 2020), are available and visible in institutional discourses as well as European public spheres. The selection of narratives discussed here is clearly not exhaustive. The different narratives reflect, and ‘amplify’, distinctive core values of the European Union, as stipulated in the TEU’s preamble as well as in article 1.1 (‘an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen’), article 2 TEU, such as human dignity, human rights, and the rule of law, solidarity and equality, freedom and democracy, as well as in article 3.1 (peace, well-being), article 3.3 (‘balanced economic growth’, ‘highly competitive social market economy’, respect for its ‘rich cultural and linguistic diversity’), and article 4.2 (‘national identities’) and 6.3 (‘constitutional traditions’). The contention is that these narratives cover a wide terrain of ‘imaginations’ of European integration, are frequently used in public discourse, and form the basis for existing critiques (cf. De Wilde 2021/RECONNECT Deliverable 14.3).

The polity narratives will be discussed with regard to: 1) a polity definition; 2) a key mechanism of integration; 3) the relation between law and politics; 4) higher values or principles of justification, and 5) the relation to societal and citizen input. The first three narratives can be understood as close to the EU institutions, and as prominently (even if not exclusively) promoted from the top-down. The right-wing-conservative and leftist narratives, more than with the EU institutions, have closer affinities with domestic actors, as well as with civil society. The participatory narrative seems predominantly emerging from the bottom-up, in particular due to activism by civil society organizations.

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15 Clearly relevant, emerging and competing narratives are the environmental one and the security or protection narrative (cf. De Wilde 2021/RECONNECT Deliverable14.3). The environmental narrative as well as the narrative of a Global Europe are of great importance to the European project but have not been selected here because they appear not (yet) as comprehensive polity narratives, that is, as comprehensive narratives that outline a relatively exhaustive understanding of the European polity, its mode of integration, and its key principles. For instance, regarding the Global Europe, ‘Power Europe’, or ‘European sovereignty’ narrative, it has been argued that it is predominantly focused on the external sovereignty of the EU but would need to develop an accompanying vision of the EU’s internal sovereignty to be credible (Verellen 2020). A development of the latter would bring it into the scope of polity narratives. Th environmental narrative is developing swiftly, and it is not unlikely that soon a more comprehensive narrative of the EU as an environmental union might emerge (Jordan 2008; Deters 2019).

16 The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.
5.1 Rule of law narrative

One prominent European narrative – prosaic and only to a limited extent reformist – is the rule of law narrative of European integration. In this narrative, integration-through-law regards the core and motor of the integration process. More specifically, “integration through the rule of law” defines what the European Union stands for’ (Lenaerts 2020: 29). The essence of the integration process lies in its legal structure and development, in that ‘European integration can only take place when both the EU institutions and the Member States respect the “rule of the game” ‘ (Lenaerts 2020: 29). The rule of law approach originally stems from the understanding of the (rule of) law as an anti-totalitarian instrument.

The EU as a founded on the rule of law is based on the ‘idea that legally constraining the relationship between Member States is an effective remedy against the great evils that have haunted the continent throughout much of the 19th and first half of the 20th century’. '[L]egal integration can be seen as a mechanism which tends to immunize nationally organized peoples from the kind of passionate political eruptions that have led to totalitarian or authoritarian governments and/or discrimination of minorities that have characterized European history in the 19th and 20th century’ (Kumm 2006: 514-15). As such, the liberal-legal dimension of the EU forms its core, not only to contrast authoritarian tendencies, but equally as its main communicative and normative structure. As expressed in the recent Rule of Law Report (2021):

The rule of law is not only an integral part of the democratic identity of the EU and of the Member States, but also essential for the functioning of the EU, and for citizens and businesses to trust public institutions. While Member States have different legal systems and traditions, the core meaning of the rule of law is the same across the EU.

Essential actors in the liberal-legal narrative are courts and a key principle is the rule of law, in particular in terms of the independence of courts operating in a framework of EU law. The argument is that the rule of law is a foundational dimension of the EU in that ‘integration through the rule of law is nothing new but has underpinned the EU since its very beginning’ (Lenaerts 2020: 29). Even more, the rule of law surpasses the core idea of the internal market as the essential underpinning of the EU: ‘European integration has long ago moved on from the internal market paradigm. It now seeks to establish an area of freedom, security, and justice without internal frontiers, where citizens may move freely and securely’ (Lenaerts 2020: 32). The perception of citizens in the liberal-legal narrative is focussed on the creation of the legal framework which creates and protects citizenship (mainly through rights, legality, and ‘equal protection under law’, cf. Lenaerts 2020: 30). It is within this legal framework that citizens can act and ‘function’. The citizen is understood as ‘enjoying’ rights, freedom, and legal protection (cf. Lenaerts 2020: 34); there is no emphasis on citizen empowerment or the need for a more active involvement of citizens in policy-making or matters of justice.

The rule of law narrative is frequently presented as non-ideological, as super partes, and as simply reflecting the foundational values of the EU (cf. Hoffmann 2016a: 5), constituting a meta-framework. Nevertheless, in some of its versions and dimensions, the rule of law narrative cannot be said to be free from a distinctive political bias, not least because it is the result of a distinctive historical trajectory. The common denominator of the rule of law narrative regards a set of minimal standards and procedures for democratic institutions and their interaction, and the protection of human rights. However, in the distinctive post-Second World War development of liberal legalism, which informs the rule of law
narrative, choices and positions have become visible that are much more specific and politically contestable than minimal standards (cf. Müller 2011). Some of the liberal-legal positions are not necessarily coinciding with every possible manifestation of liberal democracy. These liberal-legal choices regard fundamental political questions – about final authority, about the role of judicial institutions and judicial review in democratic societies, about the scope of politics, about the role of the market, and about the interpretation human rights. Political questions tend to be depoliticized in the rule of law narrative, by, for instance, delegating final authority to constitutional courts, by endorsing a strong view on judicial review, thereby precluding other possibilities of institutionalizing liberal democracy in terms of, for instance, a more significant role for parliamentary institutions or regarding more direct forms of citizen participation (cf. Bellamy 2007; Davies 2015; Hirschl 2004; Gyorfi 2017; de Almeida Ribiero 2019; Tully 2007). The viewpoint is that ‘law – or, rather, the rule of law – is here taken to better advance certain values, or valued objectives, such as peace, equity, or justice, than political process’ (Hoffmann 2016a: 3).

The rule of law narrative puts emphasis on the existing achievements of the EU, in particular regarding the rule of law, human rights, and independent judicial institutions as the very basis of democracy in Europe. Politics is understood as inherently messy and problematic (it is based on the ‘political majority of the day’, Lenaerts 2020; Kumm 2006; cf. Schmidt 2018), and in need of being guarded carefully by independent judicial courts. The liberal-legal system of the rule of law and strong judicial institutions is now threatened, however, by populist forces, which need to be contrasted by a strong defence of the rule of law, judicial independence, and trust in courts. The future of the European integration lies, according to the rule of law narrative, in safeguarding and strengthening the rule of law as well as the awareness of a shared responsibility for the preservation of the rule of law by member states and EU institutions:

Today, Europeans are facing a defining moment in the history of integration. They must stand up for the values—such as democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights—that we share in order to emphasize the point that what brings us together remains stronger than what pulls us apart. That is why the principle of judicial independence must be preserved so that the EU remains a “Union of democracies,” a “Union of rights,” and a “Union of justice.” If the next generation of Europeans is to explore new horizons for an ever-closer Union where citizens may continue to enjoy a sphere of individual liberty free from public interferences, integration through the rule of law is the only way forward (Lenaerts 2020: 34; emphasis added).

As stated in the European Commission’s 2021 Rule of Law Report: ‘While the EU is recognised as having very high standards in these areas [fundamental rights, democracy, and the rule of law], these values should never be taken for granted. Promoting and upholding the rule of law requires vigilance and constant improvement, because there is always a risk of backsliding’ (2021: 1).

17 The core of the rule of law narrative is the idea that law is an antidote to politics, that is, the ‘political will must be curtailed through externally binding rules. Yet, it is in this shift in the semantics of law, from it being an instrument of power to one against it, from it being a limitation of (political) freedom to it being its principal safeguard, that the work of liberal ideology can be discerned’ (Hoffmann 2016a: 7).
The minimal dimensions of the rule of law narrative – such as respect for the separation of powers and constitutional-democratic procedures, and the protection of human rights – are broadly shared in other narratives discussed below (even if the rule of law has different meanings and purposes in the neoliberal, federal, leftist, and participatory narratives). The rule of law narrative is closely related to the institutions (European Commission; European Court of Justice) and finds resonance also in the European Parliament and wider European society. Particular in the context of the current rule of law crisis and backsliding member states, the EP has been pro-active in monitoring the crisis as well as in endorsing more robust policy responses from the European institutions. The EP has, for instance, approved regulation that seeks to protect EU funds from misuse by EU governments who do not operate according to the rule of law. It further has undertaken steps to sue the European Commission for failing to act on the rule of law mechanism. But also less institutionalized, and potentially more critical and radical collective societal actors, tend to support a strengthening of the rule of law in Europe. By way of example, representatives of various civil society organizations, led by Carnegie Europe, have, for instance, sought to recover a liberal-rights narrative to contrast the authoritarian-populist narrative related to backsliding states: ‘To create a contrast with such authoritarian narratives, progressive narratives should appeal to values like tolerance and pluralism. These kinds of messages create support for causes such as democracy, civil liberties, equality, and environmental protection. But as these narratives of liberalism have lost traction to populist authoritarian narratives across the EU, prodemocracy civic and political actors are struggling to construct and disseminate effective messages that foster support for progressive principles. Such narrative framing is a core foundation of what the EU’s prodemocracy strategy should look like’ (Youngs et al. 2019: 3). Also more radical, left-wing transnational movements, such as the DiEM25 movement led by Yanis Varoufakis, tend to defend a largely, liberal, rights-based view of European integration, grounded in the rule of law and human rights. It should be noted, however, that such radical left forces retain a critical view of the EU’s technocratic and non-democratic dimensions (cf. Blokker 2019; Blokker forthcoming 2021a). In other words, while a minimal consensus exists on the rule of law and human rights as core dimensions of the European project and as pivotal to democracy in Europe, this does not mean that all actors accept the

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18 It should be noted, however, that European citizens do not hold an unequivocal view of human rights. As an extensive survey by the EU’s Agency of Fundamental Rights (FRA) shows, around a third of European citizens believes that human rights are beneficial only to those that do not deserve them such as criminals or terrorists. As the report importantly stresses: ‘Discussions on fundamental rights – at the level of EU Institutions and Member States – do not necessarily reflect what ordinary citizens understand by them or how they experience them in their everyday lives, nor do they necessarily reflect what people are most concerned about. With this in mind, this report explores the field of ‘fundamental rights’ as it relates to what people understand, know and experience with respect to their engagement with rights in practice’ (FRA 2019: 6).
ideological position of liberal legalism which prioritizes law and judicial institutions in an absolute manner and which tends to downplay politics (cf. Hoffmann 2016a, b).  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rule of law narrative</th>
</tr>
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| Main form of legitimacy | Formal-legal  
| Main mode of integration | Law  
| Understanding of citizen engagement | On the basis of existing rights and legal norms  
| Main problem/conflict | Rule of law backsliding  
| Need for reform | Strengthening of the rule of law  

5.2 Neoliberal narrative

A related, but explicitly economically focussed discourse is that of neoliberalism, with dimensions that some scholars refer to as ordo-liberalism. This narrative is similar to what Ian Manners and Philomena Murray have identified as ‘economic Europe’ (2016). This narrative prioritizes the economy and the market as the core of European integration and distinguishes the EU as primarily a ‘marketplace’ (Manners/Murray 2016: 192). Core principles are competition, efficiency, mobility and growth. Also in the case of the neoliberal view, the emphasis is on a prosaic approach, which, for instance, in reaction to the financial and economic crisis, sees an intensification of the European single market as the solution (Monti 2010). As former commissioner Mario Monti states in his report on the Single Market: ‘[r]elaunching the single market serves to re-activate Europe’s engine of growth and employment, and ultimately serves to expand opportunities for citizens’ (2010: 38). In fact, the ‘single market and its four freedoms embodies an ideal: that of a space across national boundaries within which citizens can move, work, do research or start a business without any discrimination’ (2010: 38; emphasis added). As stated in the current new strategic agenda of the European Commission, ‘[a] strong economic base is of key importance for Europe’s competitiveness, prosperity and role on the global stage and for the creation of jobs’ (New Strategic Agenda 2019). The perception of citizenship in the neoliberal narrative is focussed on the ‘market citizen’, for whom ‘the single market is a space of freedom and opportunity’ (Monti 2010: 6). In the neoliberal narrative, there tends to be a technocratic bias and little emphasis on actively engaging citizens in co-creating norms and rules. The main concern is to ‘empower consumers’ (Monti 2010):

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19 Following Florian Hoffmann, the ideological position of liberal legalism or ‘lawvernance’ understands the ‘EU [as] a quintessentially “legal expression” in which law does not merely provide the constitutional architecture within which politics takes place, but in which it actually takes over from politics. Hence, in a sense, the EU is an embodiment of the liberal legalism that pervades late modernity’s mode of (self-)governance’ (Hoffmann 2016b: 36). The ideological view of the rule of law is shared in the neoliberal narrative (as discussed below; cf. Davies 2015; Bartl 2018; Wilkinson 2021), in which the law becomes a vehicle for market integration. In other narratives, notably the leftist and participatory ones (also discussed below), the notion of the rule of law is emphasized in combination with a strong emphasis on bottom-up, citizen participation (a viewpoint wholly absent in the liberal-legal view).

20 See e.g. Wilkinson 2021.
Much of the disillusionment [with the single market] however comes from frustration with remaining barriers or the feeling of disempowerment that citizens experience when dealing with the single market. Relaunching the single market serves to re-activate Europe’s engine of growth and employment, and ultimately serves to expand opportunities for citizens. The first challenge is thus to empower citizens, whether consumers or entrepreneurs, to become full actors within the single market’ (Monti 2010: 39).

Historically speaking, as Quinn Slobodian argues, it was a distinctive group of neoliberal ‘constitutionalists’ – which included German ordoliberal - that originally promoted the idea of European integration around an ‘economic constitution’ (Slobodian 2018: 183, 202ff). Significantly, the law is central to this project for a supranational order (Slobodian 2018: 184). The emphasis in the neoliberal discourse is on market integration (Monti 2010), the protection of the market by means of guaranteeing competition, and the protection of citizens’ freedoms by means of rights. The core idea is the single market which is to provide increasing wealth and employment. In this discourse, the rule of law serves as a means of protecting and regulating ‘natural’ market forces. It may be argued that the neoliberal, market-driven idea has become an almost taken-for-granted dimension of European integration and its policy ‘recipes’ tend to be put forward as ‘natural’, ‘essential’ or as ‘scientific truths’, without alternatives (Tuori and Tuori 2014: 222).

In this narrative, the future of the EU is essentially connected to the single market. As argued in the New Strategic Agenda 2019-2024:

The Single Market in all its dimensions is a key asset in that regard. The EU cannot afford to under-utilise the potential of a market of half a billion people, particularly in the area of services. Short-term difficulties cannot be invoked as an argument against a long-term strategy that is bold, all-encompassing, and forward-looking. This must go hand in hand with a more assertive, comprehensive and coordinated industrial policy. The EU needs both, and needs them urgently (EC 2019).

According to Monti, the Single Market could ‘become - if properly reconfigured so as to bring real, visible, material and non-material benefits to citizens, while addressing the concerns and fears that they often associate with the market - a key component in a broader political project aimed at reconciling citizens with Europe’ (Monti 2010: 25).

As in the rule of law narrative, the neoliberal narrative is close to the European institutions, in particular the European Commission, the Eurogroup, and the European Central Bank. The neoliberal narrative is, however, widely contested in European political as well as civil society, in particular since the global financial and economic crisis. The neoliberal view is in sharp contrast to in particular the leftist and participatory narratives, but also to the federal position, in that the neoliberal narrative opposes further political integration (see below). Right-wing populist parties criticize neo-liberal, free trade positions and policy largely from a perspective of sovereigntism and ‘anti-globalism’, prioritizing national economies (cf. Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2020). Some left-wing parties and movements equally take a nationalist, sovereigntist position, inter alia criticizing austerity and the entanglement between large corporations and the European political elite, but also include transnational positions (Blokker forthcoming 2021b). The latter, transnational, left position includes progressive positions which criticize protectionism: ‘the
industries that died when the borders came down have gone forever. They cannot be recreated by impeding trade now. If we tried to revive them through protectionist policies, the price would be a breakdown of the existing, integrated Europe, with trade wars inflicting vast new losses on our peoples’ (European New Deal 2020: 4, cited in Sram forthcoming). Instead, what the radical transnational movement DiEM25 proposes is a ‘Green New Deal’ for the EU, which strongly criticizes the European Commission’s European Green Deal: ‘But the content of this ‘green deal’ is woefully inadequate to the challenge at hand. In size and speed, scale and scope, the plan fails to respect the scientific consensus about the demands of a just transition. And it leaves intact the basic economic architecture in the EU that has created the social and ecological crises we face today, one centred on growth and profit rather than people and planet’ (GNDE 2019: 16; emphasis added). The alternative Green New Deal ‘is composed of three major initiatives. The first is the Green Public Works: an investment programme to kickstart Europe’s equitable green transition. The second is an EU Environmental Union: a regulatory and legal framework to ensure that the European economy transitions quickly and fairly, without transferring carbon costs onto front-line communities. The third and final is an Environmental Justice Commission: an independent body to research and investigate new standards of ‘environmental justice’ across Europe and among the multinationals operating outside its borders’ (GNDE 2019: 16).

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<tr>
<th>Neoliberal narrative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main form of legitimacy</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Output; choice</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Main mode of integration</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Competition) law</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding of citizen engagement</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Market citizen; citizen as consumer</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Main problem/conflict</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic crisis; re-emerging of barriers to trade</td>
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<td><strong>Need for reform</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Expanding/strengthening single market</td>
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5.3 Federal narrative

A third narrative has been – as is widely recognized - a major driving force in developing the idea of a ‘post-national union’, that is, federalism. The federal idea potentially indicates radical change, for instance, in propositions for a federal union (Fabbrini 2020) or federal constitutional order. Clearly, the European peace-project, grounded in the idea to overcome inter-national strife, is deeply rooted in the federal idea. In the federal view, there is hence a suspicion of strong national sovereignty, and the need to prevent states from becoming hegemonic, as well as a strong emphasis on the need to protect individuals, or better human beings, from the abuse of power. As critically stated in the Ventotene Manifesto, ‘The absolute sovereignty of national States has led to the desire of each of them to dominate, since each feels threatened by the strength of the others, and considers that its "living space" should include increasingly vast territories that give it the right to free movement and provide self-sustenance without needing to rely on others. This desire to dominate cannot be placated except by the hegemony of the strongest State over all the others’ (Ventotene Manifesto 1944). And as more recently stated by one of the staunchest political proponents of European federalism, Guy Verhofstadt, ‘[i]t is no exaggeration that, at this point, old nationalisms pose more danger to Europe than new threats’ (Verhofstadt 2017: 7). Core actors in federalism are clearly nation-states; for the federal narrative, nation-states ought to engage in far-going collaboration, leading to supranational structures, in particular of a political kind, and a pooled form of sovereignty.
In the federal narrative, a core problem is hence identified in the reified idea of the nation-state as a closed and self-sufficient unit (cf. Nicolaïdis 2020). The federal narrative is further deeply grounded in the principle of individual freedom, that is, ‘man must not be a mere instrument to be used by others but an autonomous centre of life’, as expressed in the Ventotene Manifesto (1944). It is this principle of individual freedom that is at the heart of the belief that a division of Europe in nation-states has to be overcome. National sovereignty risks turning into domination, not least due to hegemonic tendencies of stronger states. Only an increased federalization of the European project and shared forms of sovereignty can lead to a sustainable form of supranational cooperation and the safeguarding of European civilization. According to Verhofstadt, it was the failure of a constitutionalized Political Union in the 1950s, and its replacement by a much more circumscribed Treaty of Rome, that ‘laid the foundations for so many of the current ills in the European Union’. In fact, ‘[w]ithout a political union, citizens have no way to affect union-level policy; nor does the union itself have the tools to address such issues. Brexit, Grexit, the refugee crisis, the economic meltdown, cowardice before foreign foes: all these terrible shortcomings are bound up in our missed opportunity to abandon artificial nationalism in exchange for a coherent and effective government of all Europeans’ (Verhofstadt 2017: 9). In other words, the ‘greatest threat to the safety and prosperity of Europe is a failure to finish the great project begun in 1953, to unite the seemingly disparate nations of the continent together into one grand federal project’ (Verhofstadt 2017: 10).

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The Europe we want frees people from power structures embedded in a nation state; it brings together regions and towns in autonomous political decision-making procedures; it frees the notion of democracy from the notions of territory, state and people; and frees the concept of Europe from the idea of integrating states so as to unite people; providing real freedom to European citizens (Guérot 2017: 30).

In order to overcome both the incapacities and the potential negative implications of a Europe dominated by nation-states, the federal narrative approaches Europe as in great need of unification. A unified Europe is the only way of overcoming the negative implications of fragmentation. For federalists, modern, civilized progress can be only achieved through supranational solutions.

In the project of federalization, citizens are seen as important actors, including in terms of forms of more direct engagement, even in a constituent sense. Federalism has lost some of its thrust in recent decades and it might be true, as for instance Nicolaïdis argues, that a more inclusive and abstract discourse has emerged in its stead, that of cosmopolitanism, with a distinct emphasis on diversity (Nicolaïdis 2020: 1313; Delanty 2009). The federal narrative is carried by a range of political actors, constitutes a significant part of the history of European integration, and is relatively close to the European institutions. What is interesting, and in some ways surprising, is that a federal position can also be detected in the claims and positions of (radical) societal actors (cf. Balibar 2017; cf. Moskvina forthcoming). As Etienne Balibar argues, ‘The goal would be finally to break us out of this state of pseudo-federation. This federation already exists in the form of a close interdependency among economies, territories and cultures. But it is denied by the official discourse, and daily contradicted by the way in which national political classes try to preserve their own monopoly of negotiation with “corporatist” powers and administrations, be they big companies or unions. The goal must be to invent
a new type of federation that does not abolish nationality, but rather transforms its meaning and its functions within the framework of a shared sovereignty’ (Balibar 2017).

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<th>Federal narrative</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Main form of legitimacy</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Main mode of integration</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding of citizen engagement</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Main problem/conflict</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Need for reform</strong></td>
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5.4 Rightwing conservative narrative

A fourth narrative, recently grown ever more prominent, is that of right-wing conservatism and conservative populism. It can be seen as hovering between a prosaic and a more imaginative view of European integration. It is prosaic because it underlines a traditional idea of Europe, that is, as a system of sovereign nation-states or ‘Europe of the Peoples’ (Becchi 2019). The mechanism of integration in this narrative is inter-sovereign collaboration between states. The imagination of a European polity is one in which national sovereignty remains the central principle of organization, and in which nation-states, before any other actors (courts, citizens, supranational institutions), remain the core entities. Political power retains a priority position vis-à-vis law. As argued by the conservative philosopher Paolo Becchi, ‘[t]he European political order, from the mid-17th century onwards, has been constructed on the basis of a “system of states”, that is, as an order based on the reciprocal recognition of national states’ (Becchi 2019: 16). Core actors in this narrative are hence nation-states and peoples. The latter are understood as follows: ‘[t]hat which makes a people a people is the culture which it expresses, the values which it recognizes, the forms of living together which it wants to establish’ (Becchi 2019: 10).

According to the British conservative philosopher Roger Scruton, ‘The fact is that national sentiment for most ordinary Europeans is the only motive that would justify sacrifice in the public cause, the reason why people vote not just to line their own pockets but to protect a shared identity from the predations of those who do not belong to it. It’s the real reason why Viktor Orbán does so well in Hungarian elections and why Angela Merkel is facing such radical challenge from the AfD . . .’ (Scruton 2019). The conservative narrative is clearly not merely an intellectual story, but has weight in public debate, as testified by a public declaration of 16 European conservative political forces regarding the Conference on the Future of Europe:

All attempts to transform European institutions into bodies that take precedence over national constitutional institutions create chaos, undermine the sense of the treaties, question the fundamental role of Member States’ constitutions, and the resulting disputes over competences are in effect settled by the brutal imposition of the will of political stronger entities on weaker ones. This destroys the basis for the functioning of the European community as a community of free nations’ (Joint Declaration on the Future of the European Union, July 2021).
The core principles of national sovereignty and cultural community (people) are negatively affected by the European integration project, according to the conservatives. This can be traced back to the early ideological bases of the European project: ‘it is one of the principal arguments of the contemporary European ideology that sovereignty and the nation-state are anachronistic concepts.’ Already in the early days of European integration, there existed the ‘hostility towards the concepts of sovereignty and the nation-state’ and ‘what one might call “economism”, that is, the view that politics consists essentially of the administration of the economy and society’ (Laughland 1997: 2817). As argued by Thierry Baudet, ‘[o]pposite of the idea of the nation-state are supranationalism and multiculturalism... In a collective attack on the nation-state, from the second half of the twentieth century, West-European elites have pursued a policy in which both national identity and state sovereignty were systematically weakened’ (Baudet 2016: 1830).

According to right-wing political forces, Europe can only exist by recognizing its internal borders and by understanding the European spirit as based on national sovereignty (Becchi 2019). Ultimately, Europe’s legitimacy is grounded in national peoples (Scruton 2019). National sovereignty is what historically has defined the European system of states (Becchi 2019). The European institutions are seen as relatively powerless, while a restrengthening of national sovereignty is seen as the solution. This also means that various identities are respected, rather than that a minority identity is imposed (Scruton 2019). The right-wing discourse challenges the European status quo by claiming that the current European constellation threatens national sovereignty and erases national cultures and traditions.21 While the conservatives defend a status quo of nation-state sovereignty, there is some indication of imagination as well, in that the discourse promotes the emancipatory idea of the ‘right of peoples’ (reminiscent however to a classical notion of self-determination) in a common struggle against EU domination or what is perceived as an ‘imperial’ EU.22

The key entities in this discourse are clearly reified peoples or nations, understood as natural entities. The argument favours a populist or sovereignist Europe, in which the peoples, and their main governing vehicles, sovereign states, regain primacy. The future of Europe, or the ‘recreation of Europe’, based on an ‘authentic European spirit’, is hence perceived as a Europe of the Peoples. The peoples should regain important forms of political sovereignty, not least to contrast ‘globalism’, that is, the idea of open borders and open markets. The current scenario, according to the sovereignists, goes into the wrong

21 In the words of Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán: ‘Everyone feels that our voice in Europe has been weak when it comes to our opinions on the greatest issues of our age: that migrants should not come here; that we shouldn’t have multiculturalism; that we should respect Christian traditions; that national sovereignty exists, and that nations aren’t a thing of the past, but of the future. Our opinions aren’t being represented with the weight they deserve. Voters who share our views on these issues don’t have enough influence in European politics... What matters is that in Europe there should be a political home for people of our kind: people who want to protect their families, who want to protect their countries, and who prefer cooperation among nations rather than a European empire. They should not only have a political home in their own countries, because we – Fidesz and the Christian Democratic People’s Party – are fine here; but they should also have a home at a European level. We must work to create this. I think that this political current will be a major force in Europe’, see https://miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orban-on-the-kossuth-radio-programme-good-morning-hungary-44/.
22 For right-wing (international) populism in the EU context, the Italian scholar Paolo Becchi’s Manifesto Sovranista provides an interesting elaboration.
direction: ‘The Europe of the future will be a half-breed: this ideology, the false consciousness of financial elites, is going to finalize the destruction of national European states and will end with the disintegration also of the foundations of the European spirit: Christianity and the Greek-Roman civilization’ (Becchi 2019: 21). The role of citizens in the right-wing narrative is largely one of members of a national community who express the collective will or ‘will of the majority’ in elections and forms of direct democracy, in particular referendums. While direct democracy is an important dimension in this narrative, it is often of a plebiscitarian kind (Urbinati 2014), in contrast to the idea of active citizenship (as in the participatory democracy narrative discussed below).

The right-wing narrative has affinities with other narratives in so far as national sovereignty is put upfront (as, for instance, in some leftist or left-populist approaches to European integration, cf. García Agustin forthcoming). The right-wing narrative, in particular in its populist version, is strongly contested by EU institutions (in particular the European Commission (as indicated above), the European Parliament, and the European Court of Justice) (and less so the Council), distinctive member states (e.g. the Netherlands), as well as leftist transnational movements. As argued by the radical DiEM25 movement, ‘Europe’s crisis is turning our peoples inwards, against each other, amplifying pre-existing jingoism, xenophobia. The privatisation of anxiety, the fear of the ‘other’, the nationalisation of ambition, and the re-nationalisation of policy threaten a toxic disintegration of common interests from which Europe can only suffer. Europe’s pitiful reaction to its banking and debt crises, to the refugee crisis, to the need for a coherent foreign, migration and anti-terrorism policy, are all examples of what happens when solidarity loses its meaning’ (DiEM25 Manifesto 2016: 5).

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<th>Rightwing conservative narrative</th>
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<td><strong>Main form of legitimacy</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Mechanism of integration</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Understanding of citizen engagement</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Main problem/conflict</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Need for reform</strong></td>
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5.5 Leftist narrative

A fifth narrative is that of left-wing socialism and populism. The left-wing discourse is generally closer to an imaginative or creative, and at times rather radical, approach. The core principles defended and understood as essential for European integration in this narrative are equality, participation, and solidarity. A central part of the leftist European narrative criticizes the neoliberal view, and emphasizes

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23 Manners and Murray, stressing more the policy dimensions, refer to this narrative as ‘Social Europe’ and stress that its importance has been undermined significantly since the global financial and economic crisis (Manners and Murray 2016: 193).
the EU as a project of solidarity and equality. As argued in a recent volume published by the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI),

The European Union promised prosperity for its citizens, and it has delivered on this promise. The EU is a union of prosperity – unparalleled in the world and unprecedented in history. Its economic clout and financial growth, in which the vast majority of its citizens can share thanks to mechanisms such as mandatory social participation, make it attractive to people all around the world. This is not the whole story, however; the European Union is also characterised by the creeping spread of insecurity with its myriad faces, the entrenchment of poverty in certain social groups (in particular the persistent youth unemployment in Europe’s peripheral regions) and the unsustainability of its ecological and economic transformation. The promise of prosperity, of living a good life in peace and freedom with a decent job and the right to basic social insurance, is one that we must also make to future generations without any ifs or buts, and the European project will only gain acceptance in the Member States if we can deliver on this promise. At the same time, no discussion of prosperity can be complete without reference to the need to level the metaphorical playing field for entrepreneurial initiative, or the need to tackle the present and growing wealth gap. The ever-worsening disparity between Europe’s prosperous regions and countries and its remote ones (in subjective and objective terms) is symptomatic of a major problem which calls for action in the here and now (Kuhlmann and Scherrer 2019: 14).

In the European Spring Manifesto, a document issued by various smaller left-wing forces in Europe, solidarity is put upfront:

European Spring believes that every person is entitled to a decent standard of living. 118 million people in the EU are currently at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Homeless is on the rise, and millions of households suffer from food insecurity. European citizens have a fundamental right to solidarity, and the EU must honour it (European Spring 2019: 11).

This also means that the Single Market needs transformation, according to these leftwing forces:

We believe that no government should be prevented from providing public goods because of private interests. We will replace the principle of free competition in the EU Single Market with the principle of solidarity. We will introduce fundamental changes to the EU’s state aid regulation in order to allow governments to provide better public services. We will widen the ‘De Minimis Regulation’ in order to allow public authorities to invest in critical services, and we will guarantee their right to re-municipalize them, as needed. In addition, we will reform public procurement regulation, broadening the definition of procurement for “social value” in order to facilitate cooperative ownership and allow for public provision of services like healthcare (European Spring 2019: 11; emphasis added).

In the Plan B coalition of left-wing parties (see García Agustin forthcoming), the EU’s approach to the Greek debt crisis and its grounding in austerity were strongly criticized:
It is an illusion to believe that Europe’s interests can be protected within the iron cage of the Eurozone’s governance “rules” and within the current Treaties. … We are determined to break with this “Europe”. It is the basic condition needed to rebuild cooperation between our peoples and our countries on a new basis. How can we enact policies of redistribution of wealth and of creation of decent jobs, especially for the young, ecological transition and the rebuilding of democracy within the constraints of this EU? We have to escape the inanity and inhumanity of the current European Treaties and remould them in order to shed the straitjacket of neoliberalism, to repeal the Fiscal Compact, and to oppose the TTIP (Plan B 2015: https://www.euro-planb.eu/?page_id=96&lang=en).

The left-wing narrative is at times populist in the sense that it defends ordinary citizens or the people against the establishment, including political and financial elites. Core actors in this narrative are hence ‘ordinary’ people or citizens. The people is, however, generally not understood as an ethno-cultural entity or a nation, but rather in terms of the ‘plebs’ or the marginalized, that is, those parts of society that are manipulated and exploited by elites. The virtue of the people lies not in its attachment to traditional values and national culture, as in right-wing populism, but rather in its knowledge of the situation of the ‘common man’. This knowledge is to be used, according to the left-wing discourse, to radically revise the existing European project, by means of introducing a strong, bottom-up input of citizens, for instance, in a permanent citizens assembly of the EU. There is a strong emphasis in the leftist narrative on civic activism and involvement. The main emphasis here is clearly on shifting political power away from political and economic elites to ordinary citizens, in the name of (socio-economic) equality as well as environmental justice. The future is perceived in terms of a relatively radical reform of existing institutions, not least by granting European citizens a larger role in decision-making. Left-wing populist discourse tends to draw on some of the other discourses described such as federalism/cosmopolitanism, but also on legal liberalism (cf. Blokker 2019).

The leftist narrative of solidarity and redistribution is in strong contrast with the neoliberal narrative, and is equally in tension with the rule of law narrative, to the extent that the rule of law narrative can be seen as closely related to the neoliberal market approach (cf. Davies 2015; Hoffman 2016a; Wilkinson 2021). The leftist narrative tends to have affinity with in particular the participatory narrative. It is itself vulnerable to critique from the side of institutional actors and political actors as being ‘populist’ and Eurosceptic (attacking the establishment, attacking the status quo). Leftist attention for ordinary citizens and particular marginalized groups and precarious workers tends to be denounced as forms of anti-establishment populism (Harmsen 2010; Stavrakakis 2014; Cooper 2021; Della Porta 2020).

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<tr>
<th>Leftist narrative</th>
<th>Solidarity, equality</th>
<th>Solidarity, redistribution</th>
<th>Active citizenship</th>
<th>Economic crisis; neoliberal governance</th>
<th>Radical economic reform; democratic deepening</th>
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<td>Main form of legitimacy</td>
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5.6 Participatory narrative

A sixth narrative, participatory democracy, may be seen of particular relevance for the discussion of closing the gap between institutions and citizens in Europe. Its political entrepreneurs are in particular NGOs and civil society organizations (the institution most receptive to participatory ideas is clearly the European parliament, as indicated also below). The core actor in this participatory narrative is the citizen, understood as capable political subject or homo politicus. The stress is less on strengthening existing institutions of the EU (such as the European parliament), but rather on boosting instruments and channels of bottom-up engagement by European citizens. Core principles regard collective autonomy or self-determination, citizen empowerment and active citizenship, and direct participation in decision-making. A key dimension regards hence the questioning of the legitimacy of representative politics as well as technocracy, which leads to the endorsement of politics beyond liberal-parliamentary representation:

The democratic negotiation of norms of integration takes place not only in the official fora of the traditional public sphere, but also wherever individuals, groups, nations or civilizations in the EU come up against a norm of integration they find unjust and a site of disputation emerges (Tully 2007: 74).

This narrative has been gaining prominence since the emergence of the Conference on the Future of Europe on the European political agenda in 2019. The participatory narrative however exists since at least the 1990s. Democratically oriented civil society organizations have been mobilizing and undertaking action for decades, with as main objective a democratic reform of the European Union, in particular with regard to the expansion of possibilities of citizen engagement and participation. Civic activism was particularly prominent regarding the Convention related to the Charter of Fundamental Rights (1999) (Schönlau 2005) and the Convention of the Future of Europe (2002-3). The latter saw the lobbying and participation of networks such as the European Referendum Campaign (ERC), which included NGOs such as Mehr Demokratie, the Initiative & Referendum Institute Europe, and Democracy International. The ERC was an initiative to influence the Convention on the Future of Europe with an eye on the organization of an EU-wide referendum and the inclusion of participatory instruments in the draft constitution. The specific goals of the network were: ‘to push for two ideas: first (also the first priority), a referendum on the European constitution; and second, the introduction of far-reaching elements of direct democracy (a right of citizens’ initiative including citizens’ referendums and obligatory referendums for constitutional amendments)’ (IRI Handbook 2004: 47; see also Democracy International 2005). Civil society organizations promoting a narrative of participatory democracy have remained active with regard to the Lisbon Treaty (the European Citizens’ Initiative) and are now mobilizing around the Conference on the Future of Europe (e.g. the Citizens Take Over Europe coalition).

24 The European Union itself, starting in particular with the Commission’s European Governance – a White Paper (2001), has developed a participatory narrative. This narrative is however rather different from the bottom-up narrative described here in that it stresses a top-down, selective opening to organized, professional civil society, understands participation predominantly as consultation, and is closely tied to an attempt to enhance the Commission’s legitimacy; in this, it has no generalized, structural emphasis on bottom-up, citizen participation in decision-making (cf. Kohler-Koch and Quittkat 2013).
The narrative has had institutional influence, in particular in the form of the European Citizens Initiative (art. 11.4 TEU). It is not reducible to a societal narrative, as becomes visible from the articulation of the narrative in the European Parliament. In a recent report of the EP’s Committee on Constitutional Affairs, many of the observations and claims of civic activists are reflected, and shortcomings of existing instruments are acknowledged:

According to several Eurobarometer surveys, an important part of the European population is not satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU and tends to distrust the EU institutions. Despite a higher turnout in 2019, especially amongst young people, participation in European elections remains low. A considerable proportion of citizens does not feel heard and considers the EU to be far away. In order to address this perception of remoteness, it is crucial to engage with citizens in debates on EU policies. Such transnational discussions are essential for developing a European public sphere and reinforcing the democratic legitimacy of the EU. Currently, the European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI), complaints to the European Ombudsman and petitions to the European Parliament are the only bottom-up instruments, with which citizens can challenge policies or institutions in the EU. Consequently, through continued dialogues with citizens a new public forum should be established to increase their influence on EU policy-making (AFCO 2021: 7).

The participatory democracy narrative hence envisions hence a future Europe that is more open to engagement by citizens:

The shortcomings inherent in existing approaches to the democracy problem strengthen the case for a more bottom-up and open-ended model of European integration. The EU needs an understanding of political change that highlights the role of citizen agency as opposed to enlightened elite paternalism. It needs to bring its approach to democracy into line with the fluidity of civic activism, new social movements and the changing nature of electorates. The EU’s democratic legitimacy will hinge less on controlling or limiting what comes out of Brussels, and more positively on empowering citizens. The insufficient empowerment of citizens is the crux of Europe’s current legitimacy malaise, and this goes well beyond the specific configuration of EU institutional procedures. European integration must be run in a way that is more citizen-centred. The new EU must be a project that fosters and allows active citizenship – not one that curtails the exercise of citizenship in the name of a predetermined notion of the greater pro-European good (Youngs 2017: 84).

The participatory narrative has affinity with the federalist narrative in terms of the inclusion of citizens, even if it tends to much more explicit in promoting direct citizen participation. It equally has affinities with the leftist narrative due to its prioritization of ordinary citizens. It is, however, in contrast with the technocratic, depoliticized perspective in the rule of law and neoliberal positions, but also with the ‘extreme majoritarian’ and plebiscitarian positions in the rightwing-conservative narrative. The participatory democracy narrative itself is particularly vulnerable – in particular from the institutional
side\textsuperscript{25} but also from that of political actors - to the critique of being utopian, for endorsing forms of populist direct democracy, or for wanting too radical change (cf. Youngs 2017; Corbett 2021). For instance, with regard to the Conference on the Future of Europe, in which innovative forms of citizens’ participation are central, the European Parliamentary Group European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) has stated that it ‘remains sceptical towards the structuring and planned course of the Conference of the Future of Europe’, as it seems an ‘initiative that attempts to create a shortcut for pro-European activists’ and it ‘risks being yet another attempt to push ahead with the federalist agenda, and to impose a centralised vision for Europe, without any real confrontation’. According to ECR Co-Chairman Ryszard Legutko: ‘We fear that this process deliberately aims to undermine the nation-state democracies with the opinions of self-appointed leaders and federalist activists. At best, it will be a random and unrepresentative mix of voices that has no deeper legitimacy or meaning. There is a danger that it will result in a big Tohuwabohu that leaves everyone disappointed or at odds’\textsuperscript{26}

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<th>Participatory democracy narrative</th>
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<td><strong>Main form of legitimacy</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Main mechanism of integration</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Understanding of citizen engagement</strong></td>
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The discussion of the six polity narratives is summarized below in Table 3, distinguishing inter alia between key principles of legitimation, actors/institutions involved, understandings of citizen involvement and orientation towards the future. Table 3 further – in preliminary fashion – indicates affinities between the various narratives.

\textsuperscript{25} The Council has been particularly reticent with regard to innovative forms of participation. As argued by Margalef, ‘The issues proposed [in its official position] for discussion are similar to those listed by the Parliament and the Commission but the ambition appears to be lower. Giving citizens an opportunity to express themselves (Council of the EU) is not the same thing as describing a bottom-up exercise and advocating for an instrument of permanent citizen participation (EP) or encouraging citizens to participate actively in EU decision-making (EC). By the same token, seeking to “underpin the democratic legitimacy” of the EU (Council) is not the same as making the EU “more democratic” (EP) and proposing a “New Push for European Democracy (EC)” (Margalef 2021: 4).

\textsuperscript{26} See https://www.eupoliticalreport.eu/conference-on-the-future-of-europe/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=conference-on-the-future-of-europe.
Table 3. Competing narratives of European integration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles of legitimation</th>
<th>Liberal-legal narrative</th>
<th>Neoliberal narrative</th>
<th>Federal narrative</th>
<th>Rightwing-conservative narrative</th>
<th>Leftwing, socialist narrative</th>
<th>Participatory democracy narrative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stability, order, rule of law</td>
<td>Market, growth, efficiency</td>
<td>Non-domination</td>
<td>Popular sovereignty, majoritarianism</td>
<td>Equality, solidarity, inclusion</td>
<td>Self-government</td>
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<th>Main actors</th>
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<td>Courts, EU institutions, member states</td>
<td>European Commission, member states</td>
<td>Political parties, think tanks, societal actors</td>
<td>Member states, political parties, societal actors</td>
<td>Political parties, societal actors</td>
<td>Political parties, societal actors</td>
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<td>Legality, rights protection</td>
<td>Market rationality, rule of law</td>
<td>Pooled sovereignty, representation, subsidiarity</td>
<td>Popular will</td>
<td>Horizontal cooperation</td>
<td>Voice, deliberation</td>
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<th>Main democratic rationales</th>
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<tr>
<td>Individual liberty, popular sovereignty</td>
<td>Individual freedom</td>
<td>Multi-layered democracy</td>
<td>Popular sovereignty; national identity</td>
<td>Solidarity, participation</td>
<td>Collective autonomy, active citizenship</td>
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<th>Institutional imagination</th>
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<td>European constitutional order grounded in state constitutions and EU law</td>
<td>Single Market, Competition Law</td>
<td>United States of European; European Constitution</td>
<td>National constitutional orders</td>
<td>Plurality of channels of civic input; various forms of basic guarantees</td>
<td>Citizens’ assemblies/fora; participatory (digital) instruments</td>
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<th>Scope of politics</th>
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<td>Political participation based on rights</td>
<td>Limited, regulatory</td>
<td>Federal/supranational centre with regional authorities</td>
<td>Strong leader; strong government</td>
<td>Politics beyond formal institutions</td>
<td>Politics driven by citizens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strengthening of rule of law; institutionalized rule of law monitoring; supremacy EU law</td>
<td>Deepening and extension of market integration; Strengthening austerity policy</td>
<td>Federalization of the EU; Enhanced supranationalism</td>
<td>Less supranational integration; Strengthening national sovereignty</td>
<td>Social Europe; Redistribution; Dismantling austerity policy; Enhanced democratic participation citizens</td>
<td>Extensive strengthening of citizen empowerment and instruments/channels for participation</td>
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6. Legitimacy in specific policy fields

6.1 Macro-economic and fiscal policy

As discussed above, a core dimension of the European integration project is that of market integration and macro-economic governance. Most clearly so since the financial and economic crisis of 2007 and the subsequent Euro-crisis, but surely already evident at least since the Single European Act, European economic governance expresses key tenets of a neoliberal approach to European integration. The higher principles guiding economic integration are hence competition, efficiency, free mobility, and austerity (cf. Schmidt 2018). As indicated in RECONNECT research (Closa, Fernández-Albertos, González De León 2020/RECONNECT Deliverable D10.1), such macro-economic as well as fiscal policy tends to undermine the legitimacy of the European project overall in its contrast with alternative policy preferences with a different priority of principles (such as solidarity and redistribution) (cf. Davies 2015).

A core dispute is between austerity, on one hand, and solidarity, on the other. In other words, a key tension is between those (member states) that stress an alleged lack of fiscal discipline in some other member states (as stressed by neoliberal inspired ‘frugal’ actors) and the alleged lack of socio-economic solidarity between member states (raised by social-democratic forces as well as more radical left-wing, populist ones). As stated by Closa, Fernández-Albertos, and González De León, ‘[t]he existence of a clear gap between the principles established in the European framework and the principles defended by certain polities may have consequences for the degree of support for the European process, could point towards the loss of legitimacy, or indicate some sort of democratic deficit’ (Closa, Fernández-Albertos, González De León 2020/RECONNECT Deliverable D10.1: 6).

As pointed out by the aforementioned RECONNECT research, there is an important legal dimension to the neoliberal narrative, in that some of its core understandings are institutionalized in an ‘economic constitution’. The constitutionalization of economic norms and understandings involves a ‘petrification’ of distinctive preferences, notably those of Germany (D10.1: 10). This, amongst others, means the translation into ‘primary legislation (i.e. “treaties”) decisions that usually would be left to ordinary majority democratic politics’ (Closa, Fernández-Albertos, González De León 2020/RECONNECT Deliverable D10.1: 10). In other words, such neoliberal norms are rigid and very difficult to change politically. What emerges from this is a clear conflict potential between those member states and actors that endorse a neoliberal economic policy framework, and who have the legal structures on their side, on the one hand, and those that for a variety of reasons would want to steer EU economic governance towards more democratically created and solidarity inspired policies, on the other. As RECONNECT research concludes, ‘the possible incompatibility and incongruence between the ordinary political preferences and the principles petrified in the EU macroeconomic governance framework affects the legitimacy of the European project’ (Closa, Fernández-Albertos, González De León 2020/RECONNECT Deliverable D10.1: 14). Such a potential erosion of EU legitimacy is relevant as RECONNECT research – analysing both the formal-legal norms of EU governance and the preferences of political parties as expressed in their manifestos - finds a ‘considerable difference between the dominant principles

contained in the EU regulations and those contained in the political parties’ manifestos’ (Closa, Fernández-Albertos, González De León 2020/RECONNECT Deliverable D10.1: 40-1). One conclusion is that ‘parties emphasize much more democratic quality and social justice than the EU constitution does’ (Closa, Fernández-Albertos, González De León 2020/RECONNECT Deliverable D10.1: 41).

Legitimacy does not only regard the relation between official EU policy and different (groups of) member states, but, as argued at the beginning of this working paper, involves a crucial component of societal legitimacy. RECONNECT research that analysed citizens’ perceptions of the European Union and its future indicates that European citizens put important weight on macro-economic issues (‘economy and employment’), as the third most preferred policy field, but equally stress (even if to a lesser extent) social and welfare policy (the 7th most preferred policy, see Schäfer, Schlipphak and Treib 2021/RECONNECT Deliverable D9.2: 20). In line with the findings on political party manifestos, citizens do put important weight on a redistribution of wealth and hence forms of solidarity in the EU, even if a polarization between the citizens of net contributor and net beneficiary countries can be identified (Schäfer, Schlipphak and Treib 2021/RECONNECT Deliverable D9.2: 17). Equally relevant is the preference articulated by citizens for ‘more opportunities effective participation beyond parliamentary elections’ and the fact that they ‘seem to place high value on transparency and accountability’ (Schäfer, Schlipphak and Treib 2021/RECONNECT Deliverable D9.2: 24). Such findings are in line with a recent Eurobarometer survey on the Future of Europe (EC 2021) and a consultation by civil society organizations (CTOE 2021). These various surveys indicate a consistent demand for more citizen participation at different stages of the policy-making process.

6.2 Trade policy

In RECONNECT research on external trade policy (Andrione-Moylan, De Wilde, Raube 2013/Deliverable 12.3), a main tension exists between the status quo based on free trade ideas (neoliberally inspired) and the need for further supranational integration, on one hand, and the endorsement of higher protection (‘demarcation’) of national economies on the basis of concerns of the environment, democracy (transparency, accountability), and solidarity. What appears particularly salient as an emerging concern is the environment (Andrione-Moylan, De Wilde, Raube 2013/Deliverable 12.3: 26) (not reflected explicitly in the selection of main narratives discussed above). As RECONNECT research shows, there is an important division between member states that focus not only on economic, but also on other issues, such as the environment and democracy, and the European level, and those member states that stress economic concerns primarily in relation to national economies (Andrione-Moylan, De Wilde, Raube 2013/Deliverable 12.3: 37-8). According to the research, EU institutions steer an intermediary course, predominantly promoting free trade policy and the general European interest.

Trade policy is clearly a field of politicization and contestation of formal policy, indicating the challenged nature of its legitimacy. One key conflict is between those that demand ‘more integration’ and those that seek ‘more demarcation’ in a questioning of the general policy of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) (Andrione-Moylan, De Wilde, Raube 2013/Deliverable 12.3: 39). The Transatlantic trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), and the widespread societal contestation around it, is a clear example of this (see Oleart 2021). Regarding EU Trade Policy, politicization is clearly dominated by economic concerns (free trade, protectionism, growth, labour market) (Andrione-Moylan, De Wilde, Raube 2013/Deliverable 12.3).
In addition to an important tension between free trade and ‘demarcated’ trade, RECONNECT research shows a growing tendency towards the concern of transparency in trade policy, in part as a result of societal demands for more openness in negotiation and policy implementation and access to information (Marx, Van der Loo 2020/RECONNECT Deliverable 12.1). The increased inclusion of transparency in EU norms and policy-making (cf. Marx, Van der Loo 2020/RECONNECT Deliverable 12.1) reflects an attempt to create a bridge between a neoliberally driven free trade approach (Blyth 2013) and a democratic narrative (which includes both the Leftist and Participatory Democracy narratives discussed above, cf. Oleart 2021: 221), consisting in societal demands for information, but also for input and citizen inclusion in decision-making processes. As RECONNECT research confirms, EU trade policy is characterised by a tension between transparency (grounded in the democratic principle) and secrecy (grounded in the principle of efficiency), and while transparency is increasingly institutionalized in the negotiation phase of trade policy, it is less apparent in the implementation phase (Marx, Van der Loo 2020/RECONNECT Deliverable 12.1: 10). Transparency is to be understood as part of a democratic legitimacy, which leads to greater access to information of citizens and a possibility for informed consent by citizens. At the same time, increased transparency, in its contribution to enhancing throughput and output legitimacy, by itself contributes little to robust democratic input and the actual participation of citizens in public deliberation on policy matters and participation in policy-making. The latter, in the form of a demand for more extensive citizen engagement and participation in EU affairs as expressed in the participatory narrative, is however increasingly relevant in EU trade policy as attested by the contestation of TTIP and CETA. Contestation of trade policy has shown the increased relevance of non-formal politics by means of public contestation in European public spheres and the mobilization of civil society actors against a technocratic, depoliticised and neoliberally inspired policy (Oleart 2021: 221). As argued by Alvaro Oleart, the contestation of EU trade policy cannot be reduced to a populist-right-wing argument that accuses the Brussels elites of undermining national sovereignty (as in the Right-wing narrative discussed above). Rather, it involves a range of societal actors, who politicise trade policy on the bases of consumer, environmental and socio-economic demands, and in general are driven by an ‘alternative frame led by the value of “democracy” ’ (Oleart 2021: 222, 224).

In broader terms, a Special Eurobarometer survey indicates that 54% of the European citizens appreciate international trade in that it enhances a choice for consumers, while 21% of the European citizens believe international trade is good for the European economy and 10% states their jobs depend on trade (Special Eurobarometer 491 2019: 15), a perception largely in line with pro-market and neoliberal ideas. 25% however thinks international trade has created more unemployment and 17% thought it is bad for the European economy (Special Eurobarometer 491 2019: 18), indicating a potential favouring of a solidarity and protectionist position (potentially strengthened by the position that the EU should consider social, environmental and human rights in its trade policy, as indicated by some 50%, 2019: 45).

### 6.3 Migration policy

A key challenge and (internal) tension in migration policy is between the call for the strengthening and deepening of a common European policy, on the one hand, and the principles of subsidiarity and national sovereignty, on the other. The European narratives of the rule of law and federalism, on one hand, and right-wing conservatism, on the other, are clashing in the field of migration policy. A further,
and related, challenge is the tension between the European project grounded in the principle of free mobility (in itself tightly connected to economic objectives) and the need for border control as a result of migration policy (Gadd and Grabowska-Moroz 2020/RECONNECT Deliverable D13.1; Gadd and Grabowska-Moroz 2021/ RECONNECT Deliverable D13.3). An external challenge stems from the universalist requirements and standards (such as access to justice, legal security, and efficient asylum procedures) that stem from international human rights regimes (reflected in, e.g., the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, notably article 18) in relation to migrant rights and the right to asylum (Gadd and Grabowska-Moroz 2020/RECONNECT Deliverable D13.1: 15).

Core legitimacy challenges result from an increasing politicization of migration issues, in particular since the migration crisis of 2015. In its most acute form, legitimacy challenges regard the polity level, in that member states and political actors refuse to accept the authority of the EU in migration matters (Gadd and Grabowska-Moroz 2020/RECONNECT Deliverable D13.1: 18). The EU itself legitimates its policies primarily through formal-legal forms of legitimacy, as the core form of legitimacy stems from the ‘legal rationality of the policy-making process established through the founding treaties and formed by the representative credentials of the European parliament and the Member State governments endorsing EU actions in the European Council’ (Gadd and Grabowska-Moroz 2020/RECONNECT Deliverable D13.1: 18). The main challenge comes from right-wing, conservative and in particular populist political forces who stress national sovereignty and the national popular will. A further challenge regards the tension between a largely technocratic form of governance on the EU level and the lack of democratic (representative) and direct citizen input regarding such policy (Gadd and Grabowska-Moroz 2020/RECONNECT Deliverable D13.1: 18).

As found in RECONNECT Deliverable 9.2 (Schäfer, Schlipphak and Treib 2021/RECONNECT Deliverable D9.2), immigration is considered an important policy area for European citizens (fourth amongst 12 policy areas) (Schäfer, Schlipphak and Treib 2021/RECONNECT Deliverable D9.2: 20). Similar results are shown in the Standard Eurobarometer Survey of winter 2020/21. Migration is judged as the fifth most important challenge on the European level (Eurobarometer 2021).

6.4 Counter-terrorism

As in the case of migration policy, the EU’s competences regarding counter-terrorism are circumscribed, as they remain bound by Art. 4(2) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and Art. 72 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which leave national security and law enforcement the sole responsibility of Member States (Bonditti 2021/RECONNECT Deliverable 11.4: 5). This means that counter-terrorism policy is subject to the question of what the appropriate distribution is between EU and Member State competence (Bonditti 2021/RECONNECT Deliverable 11.4: 5).

Counter-terrorism policy in the EU shows strong tensions with the rule of law, not least due to the re-emergence of a conservative discourse, with populist or penal-populist dimensions, stressing security as a priority, demarcated borders and the intensive control of territory. This discourse tends to stress political sovereignty and a defence of the national political community. The conservative discourse on terrorism can be related to sovereigntist understandings of European integration, that is, as a unity of strong nation-states (see Bonditti 2021/RECONNECT Deliverable 11.4). In this, it tends to be in tension with more liberal, neoliberal, and federalist understandings of the EU (which tend to understand
borders in a less impermeable sense) and is in strong contrast to the tendency – until relatively recently – towards increased mobility and openness. The tensions with the rule of law are enhanced by the fact that terrorism remains a chimera, that is, there is no clear and widely shared definition of what terrorism is and there is a tendency to promote a strongly dichotomic vision of terrorist violence, with significant implications for bypassing the rule of law, in contrast to other forms of violence. Furthermore, an emphasis on the anticipation of terrorism, rather than its prevention, tends to create significant tensions with the rule of law and the protection of fundamental rights.  

As indicated in RECONNECT research (Bonditti 2021/RECONNECT Deliverable 11.4), counter-terrorism and security policies remain the sole responsibility of Member States, and hence national authorities continue to play a predominant role. RECONNECT research on citizens’ view on preferred EU policy areas however indicate a preference by citizens for EU-wide policy on security and anti-terrorism (11.7% of the respondents, second most preferred policy area, after climate change and environment) (Schäfer, Schlipphak and Treib 2021/RECONNECT Deliverable D9.2: 20). Such findings are corroborated by Eurobarometer surveys, which, for instance, showed in 2016 and 2018 high percentages of citizens (82 and 72% respectively) wanting the EU to intervene more than at present in the fights against terrorism. The development of a more significant policy on the EU level seems hence to be clearly supported by European citizens, but remains cumbersome in its development.

Table 4 below briefly summarizes forms of legitimacy (institutional and political/societal) in different policy fields and indicates potential forms of overlap/affinity in legitimation between policy fields.

Table 4: Legitimacy in four policy fields

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy level</th>
<th>Macro-economic policy</th>
<th>Trade policy</th>
<th>Migration policy</th>
<th>Counter-terrorism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legitimacy (institutional)</td>
<td>- market (competition, efficiency, austerity)</td>
<td>- market (free trade, competition)</td>
<td>- integration</td>
<td>- sovereigntyism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- sovereigntyism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- formal-legal (universal human rights, legality)</td>
<td>- formal-legal (universal human rights, legality)</td>
<td>- formal-legal (universal human rights, legality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimacy (political, societal)</td>
<td>- solidarity/ redistribution</td>
<td>- solidarity/ redistribution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28 A further problematic dimension is clearly the intersection between security and migration (cf. Bosworth/Franko/Pickering 2018).

7. Concluding remarks: Towards a new narrative

This working paper identifies a plurality of (competing) core principles of justification and legitimation as expressed in grand narratives of what the EU is about. For this purpose, the working paper develops a comprehensive (even if surely not exhaustive) narrative approach towards a selection of prominent meta-narratives or ‘polity narratives’ regarding the European integration project. It is stressed that the legitimacy of the European Union is not only based on normative principles (as enshrined in article 2 TEU) and procedural standards, guaranteed through institutions (‘institutional legitimacy’, cf. Burgess 2002), but is equally about ‘societal legitimacy’. The latter regards a form of legitimacy that emerges from the societal acceptance of the justification of authority (cf. Davies 2015). According to John-Erik Fossum and Hans-Joerg Trenz, such legitimacy entails (they label it as ‘political legitimacy’):

Legitimacy is a core component in the linking of polity and social constituency. Political legitimacy refers to popular approval and to the way in which public authority is justified. Such justifications open a basic communicative relationship between political authorities and their constituent publics. This replicates a basic sociological insight that the exercise of political power in modern societies can no longer be derived from a given and stable (‘divine’) order. Political legitimacy stems instead from a contingent societal order that places substantial constraints on the exercise of political power. The legitimacy requirement thus binds any form of exercising political power back to society. In modern political orders, rule-makers and those who are and

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30 This has also come through very distinctively in the research of RECONNECT WP9 on citizens’ perceptions.
feel affected by the rule (the polity and its social constituency) stand in a functional relationship to each other (Fossum and Trenz 2006: 59; emphasis in the original).

Hence, legitimacy cannot be grounded merely in normative principles derived from rational public reason but entails a two-way communicative and legitimatory relationship between norms and institutions, on one hand, and (beliefs and convictions held in) society, on the other. The interrelationship between institutional claims of legitimacy and societal understandings of legitimate authority is intermediated by intersubjective systems of meaning-giving that in this paper have been analysed in the form of polity narratives.

In fact, the analysis in this working paper is particularly focussed on identifying a number of legitimatory repertoires or what is better understood as narratives of European integration. In recent years, there is an increased interest in the narrative analysis of European integration, from the side of institutions (EC 2014) as well as scholars (see section 3), and in relation to the range of crises the EU has been facing. In other words, the crisis of the EU is understood as involving a legitimacy deficit. The analysis here wants to contribute to the identification of the main narratives of justification for European integration that are available in the European public spheres to capture both the existing institutional attempts at legitimation, forms of critique of such attempts, and alternative narratives which potentially connect the institutions better to citizens. Narratives are related to distinctive views of change (prosaic or imaginative, reformist or radical). In addition, the paper wants to understand (with the help of RECONNECT research in terms of surveys and claim analysis) to what extent specific narratives resonate with European citizens. In the main part of the paper (section 5), six different ‘polity’ narratives of European integration have been outlined (identified on the basis of existing literature as well as the systematic reading of prominent policy and political documents), identifying key principles of justification (market integration, legal integration and the rule of law, non-domination, national sovereignty, solidarity, and democratic participation). The narratives have been briefly reconstructed based on key justificatory principles, understandings of citizen engagement, main conflicts identified, and understandings of the future of the integration project.

Subsequently, the paper briefly reviewed problems with legitimacy in the policy areas that RECONNECT looks into (based on currently available research reports and internal questionnaire), and identifies the policy areas as fields of struggle over specific narratives. A major institutional narrative is the neoliberal one, as evidently emerges from research on macro-economic, fiscal, and trade policy. Clearly, a significant factor undermining the legitimacy of the European project is an insistence on neoliberal principles such as austerity and heightened competition (in particular in Southern European countries, but not only). At the same time, the promise or objective of economic and trade policy in terms of prosperity and efficiency remains a powerful one, even if affected negatively by the global financial and economic crisis and its aftermath (cf. Nanopoulos and Vergis 2019). In this regard, alternative justifications regarding the economy, in particular equality and socio-economic solidarity, but also calls

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31 In addition, the analysis was able to benefit from research of the project ‘Transnational populism and European democracy’ (TRAPpED), of the Czech Science Foundation (Grantová agentura České republiky) (Standard Project 18-25924S) (2018-2021), coordinated by the author.
for civic input into policy-making, are relevant in terms of resonance among citizens. Such alternative justifications are however difficult to translate into policy and structural reform, due to petrified norms in an economic constitution (Closa, Fernández-Albertos, González De León 2020/RECONNECT Deliverable D10.1; Closa 2015; Davies 2015). There is clearly a gap between an institutionally endorsed neoliberal narrative and politically and societally relevant narratives of solidarity and democracy. What is further clear is that a novel, but not yet fully fleshed out, narrative is emerging, that is, the environmental one. In particular trade policy is politicized on the basis of environmental, and in a connected manner, democratic-participatory demands and concerns of transparency and accountability. In migration policy, the main tensions lie between the liberal-legal and federal narratives, on one hand, and the right-wing-conservative one, on the other. Across the policy fields, one common concern is citizen access to information, transparency, and accountability, and citizen empowerment in terms of input into the policy-making process.

The two core domains of European integration identified in this paper – law and the economy – show affinities in terms of their institutional narratives, at least in terms of a relatively elitist/technocratic approach to European integration and a general adversity to extensive citizen involvement in policy-making. In contrast, the narratives of leftism and participatory democracy clearly overlap, in a consistent attention to ordinary citizens, marginalized groups, and wider society, and a general endorsement of wider civic involvement in policy-making and calls for more robust democratic instruments. A core issue of compromise or balancing regards the relation between representative and direct/participatory democracy (articles 10 and 11 TEU). At least since the Commission’s White Paper on European Governance (EC 2001), the EU has attempted to develop other forms of democratic participation, beyond, or parallel to, the classical representative dimension (cf. Sternberg 2021). Such attempts have however not ventured beyond targeted stakeholder and civil society involvement and do not satisfy demands made by civil society and citizens for wider, more meaningful and legitimating forms of bottom-up participation. Across the narratives, affinities and potentiality for an ‘overlapping consensus’ are noticeable regarding the rule of law, legality and human rights (which is stressed both in institutional and societal narratives). A more complex potential compromise needs to be found in relation to efficiency and economic well-being, on one hand, and attention to solidarity and equality, on the other.

The imagination and construction of a new narrative for European integration has become even more urgent as a result of the Conference on the Future of Europe, which started in the summer of 2021. The various crises affecting the European project, starting with the failure of the European Constitution in the early 2000s, and rapidly followed by the financial and economic crisis of 2008, have rendered a narrative of the European status quo - grounded in an idea of the EU as a post-ideological and functional construct (cf. White 2020) - difficult to uphold. The Conference stimulates reactions from various institutional, political, and societal forces, thereby reopening ideological debate on the future of Europe. Federalist and like-minded forces see in the Conference an opportunity to relaunch supranational and

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32 It is equally true that there are strong tensions between economic and legal narratives, in particular in relation to austerity and the economic governance practices that have emerged since the financial and economic crisis (cf. Joerges and Glinski 2014; Wilkinson 2021).
federal ideas (cf. Fabbrini 2021), whereas sceptical forces seek to disintegrate the EU by proposing a ‘Europe of the Nations’, in order to ‘take back’ national sovereign control (cf. Corbett 2021). From the part of pro-European and alter-European forces in European civil society, the Conference offers an opportunity to articulate their – competing - visions and an opportunity to influence the future direction of the EU (cf. Cooper et al. 2021). The challenge is clearly to find a compromising, bridging and balancing new narrative for Europe, with clear implications for structural reform, and which is able to address the key tensions and legitimacy deficits in the European project, while continuing to respect pluralism.

The set-up of the Conference strongly emphasizes the participatory democracy narrative, confirming its centrality also for the EU institutions, even if great doubts remain as to how serious meaningful and effective citizen participation will be taken (in particular, great resistance to extensive citizen empowerment is noticeable in the Council). The Conference on the Future of Europe is a testing ground for the polity narratives identified in this working paper, as well as a potential vehicle for new narratives to emerge. If narratives of reform and innovation, are, however, to have effect, constituent dimensions of the Conference (Alemanno 2021; Blokker fc; Fichera 2021) should be allowed to materialize. At the moment, formidable resistance to any structural reform, not least in terms of treaty change, is most evident (in particular stemming from right-wing, conservative forces, using arguments of the right-wing narrative, as in the Joint Declaration, initiated by Marine Le Pen in July 2021). Undeniable seems, on the one hand, the objective need for reform of various dimensions of the EU. On the other, the potential outcome of the Conference remains entirely unclear. The Conference contains a promise of potential significant change also due to the unprecedented role of citizens as a result of the experimental design of the Conference, which could allow societal narratives to emerge clearly and to be put more robustly on the EU’s political agenda (e.g. in terms of democratic reform).
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