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Politics and Society in Contemporary Europe: A Concise Introduction

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1

The Evolution of European Identities

THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF EUROPE IS IN CONSTANT FLUX, UNDER-going significant change in recent decades and facing ongoing challenges today. There are many important topics to consider in explaining contemporary European politics. What are the main political, social, and economic issues that shape the countries of Europe, and how do these trends differ across the continent? How do Europeans govern themselves? To what extent are national interests and sovereignty subsumed by the European Union (EU) for those twenty-seven states that are members?¹ Can we speak of a common European identity, or the commonality of policy and issues across Europe? Is the EU itself increasingly shaping the nature of national policies through the trend of “Europeanization”? How are European states managing the challenge of the rising power of China and Russia, or the temperamental relationship with the United States? Do some European countries continue to wield global political and economic influence as in previous centuries, or are they declining in their status? Is the EU increasingly a global actor in its own right? This book sets out to tackle these and other issues.

Outline of the Book

Several key features collectively help to make this book distinctive. First, it focuses on the essential information needed to grasp the essence of European politics. It provides succinct analysis and meaningful examples in the form of a primer, and tries to avoid the pitfall of overwhelming detail. It is comparative in

scope analyzing broad continental trends, rather than being solely country specific or focusing on a handful of countries.

Second, the book focuses on the contemporary *political* framework (policies and institutions) of European states. It seeks to draw on other approaches, however, notably social, cultural, historical, and economic perspectives to provide a greater understanding of the political arena. Such inclusion is vital to offer a more complete overview and explanation of contemporary Europe. The book also offers insights into the relationship between European countries and the outside world.

Third, the geographical scope of the book is broad. Although I include discussion of the customary handful of larger West European countries, I go beyond this focus to consider political issues and structures in a broad array of countries. This includes discussion of small (and very small) states, as well as inclusion of countries such as Turkey and Russia that we often consider as non-European, even though they are physically on the European landmass.

Fourth, while the book's focus is on the political environment within states, we are interested in the shifting partnerships between these states. Such shifts are obvious when one thinks of Europe over the centuries (including the fluid borders of many states), but relationships in recent decades are important to consider. For example, a differentiation of "Western" and "Eastern" Europe, accentuated by the Cold War over the four decades before 1990, is less evident today, especially as many states from both camps are members in the EU together. Yet economic and social indicators of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries remain different in some areas from those of Western Europe, even though membership in the EU attunes political and social objectives to some common objectives, notably democratization and liberalization.

Fifth, the EU and the member states are both critical sets of actors in terms of their interrelationship in Europe. I do not treat the EU in a separate or distinct manner, but study and integrate it as just another actor in European politics, heavily influenced and arguably controlled by the interests of the members. The EU is unlikely to supersede the states to form a "United States of Europe," nor are states likely to undermine or abolish the EU. Their relationship is complex, symbiotic, and fluid.

The book contains ten chapters, with important statistical and explanatory country information provided in a country profiles section at the end. This first chapter continues with an overview of contemporary Europe, explaining key features of policy, and the degree to which we can identify through recent history the development of a common European identity. Chapter 2 explains policies of today's Europe through the lens of the legacies of the twentieth century. It focuses in particular on events after 1945, notably the Cold War era and its

aftermath, the establishment and development of the EU, and the impact of decolonization on select European states.

The following three chapters focus on core political processes and institutions. Chapter 3 addresses the constitutional foundations of political systems in Europe, looking at such things as the separation of powers, federalism, and parliamentary options. Chapter 4 focuses on the role of governmental institutions and leadership, such as executives and legislatures. Chapter 5 looks at aspects of political contests and participation in Europe, focusing on elections, political parties, and interest groups. Chapter 6 examines the fabric of European social issues and society, and it considers how these shape contemporary political life. I assess such factors as language, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, migration, and environmental concerns. Chapter 7 highlights important debates over public policies in European states and the EU such as with health care, labor, and gender equity.

Chapter 8 considers the political and economic relationships between European states, and assesses the external policies (limited to within Europe primarily) of a number of governments. I discuss the factors that shape national policies, including the increasing influence of the EU. Chapter 9 considers the relationship of European states and the EU with the outside world, discussing Europe's relative status and attempts to retain and contest for global influence. The final chapter pulls conclusions together regarding contemporary Europe, and highlights trends to watch for over the coming decade. There is every indication that European politics will remain dynamic and unpredictable.

What Constitutes Europe?

Endemic wars and the rise and fall of empires have shaped the map and our conception of Europe over the centuries.² The twentieth century was no exception, especially with the impact of two world wars, and changes to the European map continue with the fallout from the breakup of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) after 1991 and the continuing power of nationalism, notably but certainly not exclusively in the Balkans.³ Fundamental questions arise. What are Europe's actual geographical boundaries? How do states demarcate their borders, and how do they deal with borders that change in location or role? Has the EU altered the general perception of, and attitude toward, national borders and state identity?

Theories of nationalism, social constructivism, and political culture are important in helping to provide initial answers to these questions, in a geographical sense as well as in political and social understanding. These approaches also help inform the discussions throughout this book. Nationalism is a sense of

belonging, with people linked together by a common bond of history, language, or religion, often strengthened by an attachment to some territory. The desire of national groups for statehood has been a driving force of European politics in recent centuries, arguably since the French Revolution of 1789. Different theories emphasize different elements, with some focusing on biological factors as primary and others seeing identity as learned or competitive vis-à-vis other identities.⁴

To some extent, a goal of the EU is to dull the potentially violent ramifications of nationalism wrapped around territory and borders, but still support those aspirations linked to embracing cultural diversity. The EU is an attempt to convert the in-group to a broader pan-European identity—as part of a regionalist or globalization perspective—rather than one purely based on national or nativist characteristics. It is an important element of this book to recognize that national identity remains a strong political force (though not automatically violent) even after seventy years of the EU—or perhaps because of seventy years of the EU. The United Kingdom's departure from the EU in January 2020 is just one example of the populist opposition to globalization and regional integration, and the rise of right-wing ethnonationalist movements in general is indicative of a nativist attachment to the state rather than to the EU.⁵ These movements reflect the sense of winners and losers from EU integration and globalization. We also witness trends of a more divisive ethnic nationalism across the continent rather than a more collaborative multicultural civic nationalism.

Social constructivism emphasizes social and interactive learning and the construction of one's own reality, rather than some neutral observable facts. People, or groups of people, construct their own facts, and such facts can change or face manipulation.⁶ This approach warns us against too rationalistic an explanation of European events, such as exemplified by the liberal intergovernmental approach that states always know what their interests are and go about pursuing them. As one scholar wrote before social constructivism was a formal approach, "Logical or rational action plays a relatively minor part in political and social change. For the most part it is a delusion to believe that in social life men take deliberate steps to achieve consciously held goals. Non-logical action, spurred by environmental changes, instinct, impulse, interest, is the usual social rule."⁷ Perhaps we should not lose sight of rationality, but understand that decisionmaking is complex.

Social constructivism helps to point us, for example, toward an explanation of France and Germany's nationalistic hostility toward each other before 1945, then shifting and framing to a cooperative stance with the growth of the Cold War and the EU. As another example, European general tolerance toward minority populations changed significantly in the past decade as populists across the continent altered people's attitudes to those outside the "nation." Social constructivism helps citizens explain their relationship to their country and to the

EU as events unfold, but their “truth” is fragile and changeable. It also plays a critical role in shaping or framing what we view Europe geographically to be, and which states we perceive to be inside or outside the continent, and which people to consider as having an identity as “European.”⁸

Political culture helps to explain ideas that hold people together within a society, and offers an explanation as to whether we can foresee a single European culture emerging, or only a diverse set of national cultures. Founded on Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba’s work on civic culture in the 1960s, it is particularly interesting to view the development of the EU and the democratization of CEE in the 1990s through this lens. Almond and Verba defined *political culture* as “attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system,” and as “the particular distribution of patterns of orientation toward political objects among the members of the nation.”⁹ Through comparative studies, they saw that democracies did best where there was a mix of passive and active citizens, and where significant trust existed to allow political institutions to operate without excessive interference. Almond, in a later work, saw that one of the greatest challenges to democratization and political culture across Europe was in the post–Cold War environment where CEE states emerged in the 1990s and sought a path to democracy and political stability as well as entry into the EU.¹⁰

Recent research suggests other factors to be aware of in understanding aspects of European political culture, notably the increasingly negative attitudes toward government, along with the growing apathy toward political involvement. This research shows increased levels of disenchantment and negativity in the newer democracies of CEE, and points to the need to emphasize national difference rather than see an emerging Europe-wide consensus.¹¹ Overall, political culture helps to explain the features and characteristics of national populations as they look inward, but also provides a filter to help citizens view others on the outside of their culture.

The map of the European continent evolved over time and with different frames of reference. The Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 helped to define concepts of state sovereignty and secularism, and moved the continent away from the “normal” acceptance of religious interference in politics. The 1789 French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic wars stoked the flames of nationalism across the continent, and further helped to shape perceptions of how states organize. The Treaty of Vienna, signed after the Napoleonic wars in 1815, brought a relative peace to Europe through the construct of the promotion of conservative values, so undermining alternative perceptions and challenges raised by the French Revolution. Yet the strength of nationalism ushered in the unification of Italy in 1865, and the unification of Germany in 1871. Prior to

unification, both countries comprised a number of principalities. Earlier in the nineteenth century, France and then Austria occupied much of Italy. By 1900, a handful of dominant empires consolidated power (Poland or the Polish-Lithuania Commonwealth, for example, had disappeared from the map, along with Bohemia), with little love lost between them, and even less representation to minority peoples within the continent.

World War I (1914–1918) triggered the collapse of four of these European empires—Austria-Hungary, Germany, Ottoman, and Russia—and led to a massive nationalistic (or “self-determination” in the words of US president Woodrow Wilson) restructuring of Europe, most notably with the modern creation of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Yugoslavia. World War II (1939–1945) brought about another major transformation of the map of Europe, forcibly changing nationalistic perceptions. This included the expansion westward of the Soviet Union, and the pushing of Poland across the map to the Oder-Neisse Rivers, with yet another demarcation of Germany’s eastern border (only finally given international recognition in 1990).

Another transformation of the European map occurred after 1991, with the collapse of the USSR and the independence of many republics that had been part of it, including the (re)emergence of the sovereign Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, as well as states such as Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, and Ukraine. As an example, the city of Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania today, began the twentieth century as Russian, then became part of Poland in the inter-war period, then part of the Soviet Union after World War II, and only in the 1990s the capital of Lithuania. The city changed hands multiple times during both world wars. The end of the Cold War also contributed to tensions and civil war within Yugoslavia, which broke into its constituent ethnic units, as well as within Czechoslovakia, which also divided into Czech and Slovak states in January 1993. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and its desire to control the Russian-speaking enclaves of Donetsk and Luhansk and perhaps the whole of Ukraine, signaled the ongoing contest over the map of Europe.

If the physical borders of Europe proved fluid over the centuries, then the political question of what constitutes Europe also needs consideration. Who defined Europe as a separate continent? A dispassionate observer could simply perceive it as geographically a small appendage of Western Asia. Physically, Europe is small as a continent, but its historical power and prowess allowed Europeans to frame their land a continent. The West European core of countries that “shaped” and colonized the world in previous centuries possesses a small landmass as a fraction of Europe. In terms of landmass today, according to the World Bank, the EU total of twenty-seven member countries (EU27) has a land mass of 3,999,622 square kilometers, which puts the whole bloc at just one-

sixth the size of sub-Saharan Africa, less than one-quarter the size of Russia, and less than half the size of China or the United States.¹² As a point of reference within the United States, the state of Texas has a landmass equivalent to Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and Switzerland combined. As another indication of the compact size of Europe, following the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl (then inside the USSR, though today in Ukraine) in April 1986, nuclear fallout was recorded within a week across virtually the whole of Europe, including Italy, Spain, and the UK. In terms of population size today, the whole of Europe (including Russia) stands at 743 million according to the United Nations, just less than 10 percent of the total world population.¹³ The EU27 population stands at 448 million, about 6 percent of the global total.

Observers generally demarcate Europe's western, northern, and southern geographical borders by water, either the Atlantic Ocean or the Mediterranean Sea. The eastern border, however, is more problematic and more difficult to pull together a consensus. Directly east, the end of geographic Europe, for many, runs along the Ural Mountains of Russia, dissecting that country into European and Asian sectors. An age-old question has centered on how "European" a country is Russia, if at all. Is a country European when several million of its citizens live east of Beijing, or when its eastern border is only 5 kilometers from the United States?¹⁴ Russia has played a critical role in European politics for centuries, and borders five EU member states (plus Norway). It is a matter of framing as to whether we perceive it as European, or even whether it could become a member of the EU. Many include only Russia west of the Urals as European, but this is problematic as it excludes much of Russia that includes Siberia, itself a landmass the size of Europe. For some, the issue of Russia's Europeanness ties to its political situation. If the country were a vibrant liberal democracy, with Russians eager to tie themselves closer to Europe, perhaps more would frame Russia as a European country. This designation appears less likely following the near universal European opposition to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

A similar question regards the status of Turkey. For many, the Bosphorus divides Turkey into European and Asian segments, with the vast majority of Turkey physically in Asia. Historically, though, Turkey has been an integral part of Europe, notably through the Ottoman Empire, and today many perceive Turkey as European. For example, it has been a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) since 1952—and is involved in ongoing and seemingly endless membership negotiations with the EU. Turkey first applied for EU membership in 1959, but the EU only accepted it as an official candidate for entry in 1999, some forty years later. Part of the reason for the delay was instability inside Turkey, and a military coup d'état in 1980. Negotiations on membership formally

opened in 2005, but they continue to lead nowhere, even though such negotiations at face value point to the acceptance of Turkey as “European.”¹⁵

EU officials offer various reasons for the delay in membership, such as the lack of democracy in Turkey, various human rights violations, the relatively underdeveloped economy, significant cultural differences, and the fact that it is largely a non-Christian country. Understated fears are that it would become the largest member of the EU by population (just ahead of Germany), and transform dramatically the nature of the organization, including potentially shifting its center eastward. Some opponents state that Turkey is “not European” because it is not Christian, supposedly making the argument for EU membership a nonstarter. If Turkey were to join the EU, then why not its neighbors sharing common borders, such as Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Iraq, and Syria?

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), established in 1947, has a more fluid and functional concept of what Europe is.¹⁶ Besides all the “core” countries of Europe as included in the EU, the UNECE

Box 1.1 The Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire, founded at the end of the thirteenth century, expanded via war over the following centuries to occupy much of southeastern Europe (Greece, Hungary, Romania, the Balkan states, and parts of Ukraine), defeating weakening Christian forces. It inflicted the final defeat on the Roman Empire in 1453, with the help of the new weapon of gunpowder, after the Romans had held on to a truncated empire for a thousand years following the fall of Rome (in 476) in its eastern capital of Constantinople (called the Byzantine Empire).^a The Ottomans eventually occupied all the land around the Black Sea, as well as much of what we call today the Middle East (though not Iran). Ottoman control also ran across North Africa, including Egypt, Libya, and Algeria. The empire

expanded the influence of Islam into Europe, where it still has considerable impact on the politics of the Balkans, notably in Turkey as well as Albania and Kosovo (following their victory over the Serbs at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389). Its defeat in World War I enabled Britain and France to supplant Ottoman influence across the Middle East. Britain took control of Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine (Israel) along with its ongoing control of Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar. France took control of Lebanon and Syria. Britain and France along with Greece, Italy, and the Soviet Union had plans to dismember Turkey and share it among themselves, but a Turkish national uprising thwarted those plans and led to the creation of an independent Turkish state under Kemal Atatürk in 1923.

Note: a. Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, abridged by D. M. Low (London: Book Club Associates, 1960), chap. 65.

membership of fifty-six countries includes many to the east, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Israel, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. Are these states European? Part of this categorization is because there is no other obvious or palatable region in which to put these countries, such as is true of Israel. The United Nations itself categorizes forty-four countries in Europe.¹⁷ This list includes Iceland, Russia, and Ukraine, but excludes Cyprus, Turkey, and states on Turkey's eastern border. Many of these states are members of the EU's European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), whose original intent was to help some of these states prepare for EU membership.¹⁸

Psychological and cultural factors, along with geopolitical power, also shape the concept of boundaries. The British at the height of their global influence centered the world's maps and time zones on London (at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich), something that happened in practice before an international treaty signed in 1884 formalized it. Similarly, the larger West European countries shaped an image of themselves and their powers, and defined outsiders in terms of *Near East*, *Middle East*, and *Far East*, terms that still resonate today to Europeans even if they are politically inappropriate. As mentioned earlier, we can debate where the eastward border of Europe actually is, and how much we can embrace countries such as Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, and Turkey as European. Where there are common land borders, it is difficult to say where Europe should end. Water barriers are perhaps more helpful in providing boundaries.

The English Channel has had a marked impact on Britain's political and social development in contrast to continental Europe, even though the distance from Dover in the UK to Calais, France, is a mere 21 miles (34 kilometers).¹⁹ Although the UK may be physically part of the European continent, for long periods of its history it acted politically and psychologically aloof. Politicians and citizens alike, who wanted to reinforce this distinction, drove the UK's departure from the EU in January 2020, preferring to liberate the country from the shackles and the shadows of the EU. In terms of the potential barrier of water, one can raise similar questions about Iceland. It is 928 miles (1,494 kilometers) from the nearest European capital, Dublin, but considers itself European and is a member of the European Economic Area (EEA). Greenland is even further from the European landmass but, as a dependency of Denmark, it also perceives itself as European. Cyprus lies less than 200 miles from Syria and Lebanon, and to the east of Istanbul and Ankara. Malta, another EU island member, is a similar case, where it lies closer to the African capitals of Tunis and Tripoli than the nearest European capitals of Athens and Rome.

Why should Morocco not consider membership in the EU as it is only 8 miles (13 kilometers) from Spain, or Lebanon, whose capital of Beirut is only 129 miles (208 kilometers) from Cyprus? In centuries past, after all, these countries were part

of Europe through their membership in the French Empire, or the earlier Ottoman Empire, or the even earlier Roman Empire. More recently, most of North Africa was part of Adolf Hitler's German Empire in the early 1940s. Some EU policies today, notably the intergovernmental Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), recreate the idea of a "greater" zone of Europe embracing all countries around the Mediterranean.²⁰ Do culture, language, and religion, however, preclude such states from being European, or could a change in perception accommodate this? Likewise, how can the Black Sea divide European states from outsiders? Are countries on the western shores of the Black Sea naturally European (Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, Ukraine), whereas those on the eastern and southern shores non-European (Georgia, Turkey)? Membership of all these states with Russia in the Istanbul-based Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) complicates this issue. The answer is perhaps how politics defines geography and culture.

We can see, then, that an easy definition of Europe is elusive, even in a "simple" geographical sense. Other ideas of Europe suggest it is held together by a shared set of ideas or memory, or by a common European culture, or by its interdependence physically and economically, a feature strengthened by the EU.²¹ I explore these ideas further in this chapter and throughout the book.

European Society

The above discussion points to the fact that defining what constitutes Europe is not so straightforward, where political, historical, and cultural/social considerations as much as geography help to shape the answer. For the purposes in this book, I am adopting—for convenience rather than outright principle—the framework of the Council of Europe, which comprises forty-seven member countries. The Council of Europe, formed in 1949, is one of Europe's oldest organizations, and predates the EU. The list of countries includes all EU members, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine, but excludes Belarus and Israel (which has observer status). The Council excluded Russia from membership in March 2022 after its invasion of Ukraine, so bringing the Council's membership to forty-six states, at least temporarily, although I will continue to refer to membership as forty-seven countries.²² It includes other former Soviet republics on the east of the Black Sea such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, and microstates such as Andorra, Liechtenstein, and Monaco. These forty-seven countries provide a challenging focus of study at just under one-quarter the membership of the United Nations.

Population totals of European countries vary considerably. According to the World Bank, Russia has the largest population at about 144 million, but only five others are above 60 million (Turkey, Germany, the UK, France, and Italy, in order

of population size). Looking from another perspective, twenty-nine states have populations less than 10 million. Four of these states have populations less than 100,000: Andorra, Monaco, Liechtenstein, and San Marino.²³ The Holy See (Vatican) has observer status at the Council of Europe, with a population of just under 1,000. Population density in Europe varies considerably, from Monaco with the highest density of just over 19,000 per square kilometer to Iceland with the lowest density of 3 per square kilometer.²⁴

Another basic feature of European society is that it is relatively wealthy, although there are significant differences across Europe. According to the World Bank for gross domestic product (GDP) per capita 2019 current values, the range within the EU runs from Luxembourg at \$114,704 down to Bulgaria at \$9,838. Denmark tops the Nordic countries at \$60,170. Microstates generally possess strong economies, but poorer countries are present as one moves eastward and southward across Europe. Albania, for example, has a GDP per capita rate of \$5,353, with Ukraine a very low \$3,659.

A shorthand way to approach the social geography of Europe is to differentiate core and peripheral areas. One can perceive the core of Europe to be inside of a line drawn between London, Berlin, Milan, and Paris. Within this area reside a majority of European citizens, and the area holds much of the economic and political strength of Europe. As a general rule of thumb, the poorest and least populated areas of Europe lie on the outer edges of the continent: northern Scotland; the southern regions of Portugal, Spain, and Italy; Greece; the Arctic Circle; and states in the extreme east of Europe. The countries of the periphery that have EU membership required significant financial investment and assistance to join the EU and to remain viable and competitive in the European arena. Certainly, there are success stories in those poorer regions.

This simplification of Europe creates some problems of course. Spain and Portugal recorded impressive economic growth since their admission to the EU in the 1980s. Ireland has shaken off its image as a passive agricultural-based economy to be a dynamic leader in new technology with a GDP per capita almost twice that of France. The Nordic countries are also vibrant economies with a significant role and stature in Europe. Similarly, the expansion to the EU27 has brought in new players, notably Poland, to the main table of Europe. Despite all these caveats, there is some truth in understanding the relative strength of the core of Europe, and this extends to the political leadership and policy direction of the EU—at least in recent years (see the Country Profiles section at the end of the book for more details).

Despite the ability of people to move and work freely across the EU27, there is relatively little migration within the EU, and most countries possess only small minorities of noncitizens. Belgium, hosting the EU's core institutions, has the

Box 1.2 What Is Scandinavia?

The term *Scandinavia* perhaps owes its origin to Pliny during the Roman Empire as a region beyond its control. Scandinavians embraced the term during the 1830s as it spread into a political movement, solidified by a poem by Hans Christian Andersen in 1839, “I Am a Scandinavian.” Within the region, Scandinavia normally refers only to Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. For many outside the region, Scandinavia is a broader concept also including Finland and Iceland. These five countries form the *Nordic group of states*, a term widely accepted. These five

countries have a long history of trade, war, and empire, and have occupied each other for long periods. For example, Sweden controlled Norway during the nineteenth century as the price paid by the latter for its support of Napoleon Bonaparte. The contemporary map of the region only came about after the independence of Finland from Russia in December 1917 in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. For convenience, I refer to Scandinavia loosely as the five Nordic countries.

highest population of foreign residents, but that figure is under 10 percent of the total population. This is primarily due to cultural and language factors, in that most Europeans do not wish to move from their own countries. Inward migration from outside the EU has been much more of a contentious issue on the political landscape, with significant numbers of non-Europeans, legal and illegal, joining the workforce of many West European economies. The workforce of Europe has moved primarily into service industries, with manufacturing shrinking to less than a third of the workforce, and agriculture down to about 2 percent. Agriculture and fisheries are contentious economic sectors within Europe that bring regular clashes with countries beyond the continent, notably China. In terms of their contribution to Europe’s GDP and workforce, however, they provide small contributions.

European states are not always homogenous, and cultural and linguistic differences provide fault lines inside many countries. Nationalism and time have erased some of the interesting historical examples, such as Spain controlling the Netherlands, or France parts of Italy. In Central and Eastern Europe today, these pressures can be witnessed in the push for the “velvet divorce” in 1993 of Czechs and Slovaks within Czechoslovakia, as well as the more stressful breakup of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. In Western Europe, the nationalism of Welsh and Scots inside of the UK and their occasional calls for independence highlight the impact of culture and history in social life. The continuing British possession of Gibraltar, despite pressure from Spain for its return, is another example of history at work (see Box 1.3). Similarly, we see pressures in the Basque and Catalan regions of Spain, and in Corsica within France, displaying openly significant social and political divisions.

Box 1.3 Gibraltar: Why British?

Gibraltar is an interesting anachronism of European history. Occupied by the Moors in the eighth century, Spanish forces took control in the fourteenth century. Gibraltar was ceded to Britain in 1713 following Britain's partnership with the Dutch and Austrians (Habsburgs) to take control of Spain, and the UK has held the land since then. Today, Gibraltar is a British Overseas Territory with about 34,000 citizens, and a total territory of 10 square kilometers. In past EU elections, citizens voted as part of South West England. Spain has repeatedly negotiated for its return, but without success. Gibraltar proved immensely important as a British naval base in the nineteenth century, especially in battles at Trafalgar

with Napoleon (1805) and against Russia in Crimea (1854–1856). The base was also important during the two world wars in the twentieth century, but with Spain's membership in NATO after 1982, the need for British control of the port diminished. However, the UK refused to give up the port on the southern tip of Spain. During the Brexit referendum, 96 percent of citizens in Gibraltar voted to remain in the EU as their economic livelihood requires an open border with Spain. Negotiations with the EU allowed a special dispensation to keep this border open and have Gibraltar join the Schengen zone, even though it remains a British possession.^a

Note: a. Raphael Minder, "Gibraltar Gets a Deal of Its Own on Borders," *New York Times*, January 1, 2021.

War and Peace: Europe in Constant Flux

It is a cliché to say that things never stay the same, or that change is constant, but some ignore this adage when contemplating Europe's geographical development. Their perception is of an old, long-established continent, where countries and their physical locations have been stable for many years. This perception, however, is factually incorrect. The political and social map of Europe has constantly changed over the past 2,000 years, and continues to shift. War is a constant defining feature of Europe. This is evident dating back to the classical writings of Thucydides about the Peloponnesian Wars between Athens and Sparta from 431 to 404 BCE, as well as all the associated wars in the region during that period.²⁵ We can see this also in the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli, who examined the machinations of power politics in Italy in 1516, and wrote these immortal words about European politics: "A prince, therefore, should have no other object, no other thought, nor should he adopt any other art as his profession, than war and its rules and discipline . . ."²⁶ As Martin Wight summed up regarding sovereign states in Europe since the sixteenth century, "War is inevitable, but particular wars can be avoided."²⁷

In the fourteenth century, there were hundreds of identifiable principalities in Europe. Today, with our adoption of the Council of Europe's membership, Europe has forty-seven countries. This is actually an increase in numbers from prior to World War I, and shaped particularly in the past thirty years with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the breakup of Yugoslavia into its component national parts. The transition of the European map weaves into the impact of war over the centuries, and we can briefly mention key events to highlight this.

The Greek city-states are often symbols of the beginning of democracy, but the Romans superseded the Greeks with arguably the strongest and most influential of empires, the first great (European) empire of a modern age, well documented and well preserved. The Romans left a legacy of law, language, and technology from Spain to Britain (though not Ireland or Scotland), from Greece to Germany, and their "European" empire included today's Middle East and North Africa. This empire lasted for centuries, until it finally started to fall apart from its own excesses and from external pressures. The continuation of the empire from its outpost in Constantinople (Istanbul), even after Rome collapsed, provided a significant legacy to Eastern Europe, most particularly in the Coptic Church, a conservative form of Christianity still prevalent in Russia and Greece today.²⁸

In northern Europe, the broad sweep of the Vikings between the eighth and eleventh centuries left a lasting impression beyond their Nordic homeland in places such as Iceland and Ireland. The impact of Islam across southern Europe provides evidence of another major empire, dating from its control of Iberia in 711. Islam's influence was prominent in shaping mathematics and astronomy in Europe, contributing to Europeans' ability to later navigate and conquer the world. Islam's impact is still felt today in the Balkans, as the Ottoman Empire maintained its grip on North Africa and southeastern Europe until the early twentieth century. Once Iberia broke free from Islamic control, with the liberation of Granada in 1492, the Spanish and Portuguese expanded their overseas growth. Portuguese traders populated areas of Africa and the Far East while searching for the spice routes, and looked to the "new" world (as perceived by Europeans) of the Americas. The Spanish also ventured outside of Europe, though they clashed with the British for naval supremacy during the sixteenth century and beyond.

Martin Luther's challenge to Catholicism reverberated around the continent for several centuries (and arguably down to the present). The Thirty Years' War from 1618 to 1648 killed almost one-quarter of the European population, and led to an important shift in power in the Treaty of Westphalia signed in 1648. Under this treaty, the Pope agreed to reclude himself from political matters across Europe, so limiting somewhat the role of the church and marking the

establishment of sovereignty and the modern state system in Europe. The treaty also tried to establish some norms of behavior to limit conflict.

The French Revolution of 1789 dramatically ended monarchy in France (though it briefly resurfaced during the mid-1800s), and threatened monarchical rule across Europe. The birth of modern-day nationalism gave a radical edge to French politics, and Napoleon Bonaparte made efforts to export that across Europe. He was finally defeated at the Battle of Waterloo, just outside modern-day Brussels in 1815, another critical turning point in European history, with the

Box 1.4 Pandemics in Europe

As the saying goes, the two inevitable things in life are death and taxes. In Europe, we can add wars and pandemics. The Peloponnesian War, between Athens and Sparta, was partly defined by a pandemic that swept through Athens and killed at least two-thirds of its citizens, weakening it to help facilitate Sparta's victory. Pandemics have been significant across European history. The bubonic plague swept the continent between the sixth and eighth centuries, killing an estimated 50 million people in Europe, contributing to the continuing decline of the Roman Empire and the rise of religion. In the fourteenth century, another bubonic plague known as the Black Death swept Europe killing up to half of the European population. The Great Plague in London in 1665 killed 20 percent of its population, but its end was helped by the Great Fire of London the following year. The Spanish flu of 1918–1920 killed about 50 million worldwide, and killed more people in Europe than the previous four years of

World War I. The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020–2022 caused incredible dislocation to Europe and its economies, though with a death toll much less than the pandemics previously mentioned. As of May 2022, the death toll from Covid-19 for European countries stood at 1.97 million. The UK topped the list in Western Europe with 176,412 deaths.^a The virus tested and exposed the limits of cooperation among European governments, and its impact will reverberate throughout the continent for some time. As a final note here, I should mention that Europeans have been responsible for the exportation of pandemics and deadly diseases to other continents over the centuries, often through their colonial policies. Whether across Latin America, or with Native Americans in what would become the United States, or Aboriginal citizens in Australia, European disease wiped out millions. At times, this unwittingly occurred, but there is some evidence that on other occasions there was no attempt at mitigation.^b

Notes: a. Conor Stewart, “Number of New Coronavirus (Covid-19) Deaths in Europe Since February 2020.” *Statista*, May 8, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1102288/coronavirus-deaths-development-europe/>.

b. Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972).

armies of Prussia joining British and other forces to tip the scales against Napoleon. The Concert of Europe, established in Vienna later that year, provided a novel mechanism for European peacekeeping, stability, and conservatism, as well as an attempt at an ongoing European diplomatic dialogue. This “Concert” included the five major European powers at the time—Austria-Hungary, France, Prussia, Russia, and the UK—and this had modest success in maintaining some peace, and averting revolutionary pressures, inside Europe over the following century, though Europeans exported their conflicts in the race for colonies and the “Scramble for Africa” in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The Concert did not eliminate all wars from Europe, and nationalism remained a potent force.²⁹ One notable event was the Crimean War between 1853 and 1856, exhibiting the tension between the UK and its allies with Russia over access to India and parts of the Ottoman Empire, which changed the nature of warfare through use of the railway and the telegraph. This war was also famous for the work of Florence Nightingale in the treatment of war casualties. It was actually the Battle of Solferino in 1859, part of the War of Italian Unification, which shocked Henry Dunant over the treatment of soldiers on the battlefield and led him to launch the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva in 1863.

German principalities, led by Prussia, pursued their quest for unification and continental dominance through wars against Austria and France (then the leading continental powers) in the 1860s and early 1870s. Germany’s defeat of France in 1870, and the proclamation of a new unified German Empire in January 1871 (at Versailles, just outside Paris, to heighten French humiliation), was important in several respects.³⁰ It marked the rise of a united German state to European great-power status, soon to surpass the UK to become the continent’s dominant economy. This set off a battle for supremacy over Europe that was going to engulf the continent (and many parts of the world) over the next century. It also heightened the bitterest of rivalries between France and Germany, a rivalry that only seemed to be satiated with their partnership in the EU after three major wars over seventy years. The map of Germany changed numerous times over the next century, culminating in its current configuration after the reunification of the country in 1990. But its economic preeminence remained almost constant.

Attempts to maintain a balance of power and arms control measures within Europe and globally were promoted during the Hague peace conferences at the turn of the twentieth century (1899 and 1907), but their limited success was exposed in the breakout of the Great War, or World War I (as it later became known), in 1914. The end to major wars in 1815, 1918, and 1945 provides turning points in the political map of Europe. Likewise, these wars provided the

impetus to new forms of political cooperation in Europe. The defeat of Napoleon in 1815 led to the Concert of Europe. The end of World War I in 1918 led to the Geneva-based League of Nations, which became essentially a club for European states dominated by France and the UK, as well as the creation of a swathe of newly recognized countries across Central and Eastern Europe. The defeat of Hitler in 1945 eventually led to the Treaty of Rome in 1957 and the creation of the EU, as well as to the United Nations (in 1945).

The recent bout of boundary redrawing brought about by the collapse of Soviet influence at the end of the twentieth century is almost complete, with outstanding disputes in the Balkans (e.g., with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Serbia) edging toward potential settlement. Serbian threats in 2022 to undermine the power-sharing consensus in Bosnia and potentially tear the country apart point to the ongoing fragility. Russia's recognition of two separatist enclaves, Donetsk and Luhansk, in eastern Ukraine and its invasion of Ukraine in 2022 indicate Russia's willingness to continue to redraw the map of Eastern Europe. The dispute between Greece and Macedonia—Greece opposed use of the name Macedonia because of its territory in northern Greece of the same name—was resolved in 2019 with the adoption of the name of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The contemporary challenge of geography and maps perhaps relates less to political and military differences, although Russia's incursion into Ukraine and its annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol in 2014 (and its physical invasion of Ukraine in 2022) may be a partial exception, as there are cultural factors at work here also. More significant are social and economic factors, especially as the EU attempts to build cohesion and unity of purpose in many diverse areas across much of the continent. Rising subnationalism could still have significant repercussions on the map of Europe. Will Belgium, Spain, and the UK survive as currently configured, for example? Will Greenland wrest independence from Denmark?

European "Exceptionalism" and Identity

So, what contributes to the identity of contemporary Europe? What differentiates Europeans from each other, and what aspects of culture do they share? As mentioned earlier, much of our understanding of identity hinges on the work of social constructivism. Our identity is less an undisputed or neutral "fact" than a result of how we "frame" and view events. Our perception of the world or our country becomes our reality, and shapes the way in which we make decisions. There is no objective, neutral, or all-encompassing view of Europe, but rather

how we picture Europe is a result of our perceptions. People across Europe view their continent differently, and view the history of Europe differently. Similarly, there are differences in how citizens of a country perceive their own country, as well as other countries.

With these caveats in mind, we can attempt to trace trends and factors that help to shape our views of contemporary Europe and what Europeans may have in common. Are there common threads that we can link to explain what binds Europe together, besides simple geographical proximity? Much of this hinges on the idea of the exceptionalism or the superiority of Europeans, that they were able to influence not only developments within the continent but also in the outside world. This hubristic narrative promoted and nurtured by Europeans sees the world revolving around Europe, a narrative under siege today as we will see. Trends discussed here primarily emerge from Western Europe, reflecting the historical dominance of these countries in the continent. Wars shape our understanding of the continent as discussed above, but here we turn to a broader and admittedly more sweeping consideration of the impact of ideas and ideologies.³¹

Philosophy

Europe has a strong philosophical tradition valuing the importance of ideas dating back more than 2,000 years. Philosophers of Ancient Greece, such as Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates, accompanied by the writings of Thucydides, remain central to modern discourse. Aristotle's classification of government into rule by the one, the few, and the many remains a basic starting point for much of our study of comparative government. The Roman Empire, though not necessarily renowned for its pure philosophical reflections, provided an important model of government and rule that shaped many aspects of European life—transportation routes, language, legal frameworks—that remain of interest to us today. This is not to say that Europeans were the only citizens philosophizing in ancient times, as clearly other civilizations were vibrant around the world, and from which Europeans often borrowed ideas.

Major changes in thinking slowly transformed European life, including the Renaissance (fourteenth to sixteenth centuries), the Reformation (sixteenth century), and the Enlightenment (eighteenth century). Each of these forced adjustments in thinking at the time, and transformed the debate about political, social, and religious structures. Martin Luther led the challenge in the sixteenth century against the excessive power of the Pope and the Catholic Church, leading to the growth of the “protest-ant” church in many areas of northern Europe. The printing of the Bible into German from Latin had some role in the steady development of German nationalism. European classical philosophers such as Immanuel

Kant, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Locke, and John Stuart Mill promoted concepts of liberty, democracy, and individual rights, whereas others such as Thomas Hobbes and Niccolò Machiavelli highlighted limitations. The development of the modern European state stemmed from these important philosophical debates—as well as brute military force, and resulting treaties, such as the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia—and the evolution of sovereignty and the secular state developed from these previous eras. In more modern eras, one can draw on philosophers such as Karl Marx, Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, and Jürgen Habermas to continue this European tradition.

The importance of these philosophical concepts, however, has limitations. They are all rather elitist, as most Europeans then or now would probably not know many of these philosophers or what they argued, and their ideas do not necessarily transcend the continent. The impact of these and other European ideas are not necessarily positive for the continent. The religious intolerance by Christians during the Crusades in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries severely affected peoples of the Holy Land. The cultural arrogance and quest to exploit the “New World” (to Europeans) during the Age of Discovery in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and again in the nineteenth-century Scramble for Africa, all led to incredible hardship and suffering for those at the brunt end of European ideas and conceptions of moral leadership and superiority. Imperialism, both economic and cultural, is a major European philosophy justified for many harsh actions around the world to benefit Europeans. In the twentieth century within Europe, ideology brought similar hardship and misery, and the killing of millions of citizens at the hands of their own egalitarian communist governments apparently following Marxism.

The impact of these philosophical approaches is uneven across Europe. The Reformation clearly did not spread much beyond northern Europe, as today’s concentration of Catholicism in southern Europe and Islam in southeastern Europe portray. Likewise, Eastern Europe barely felt the power of the Enlightenment and ideas of political justice. For example, serfdom existed in Russia until the Emancipation Reform of 1861, and lingered until the 1906 revolution. The relative absence of political reform in CEE and Russia contributed to the continuing prevalence of autocratic rule and significant inequality into the modern era. This also should not detract from the awareness of massive squalor and inequality in Western Europe during much of this period.

Religion

A significant portion of European identity centers on the interaction among, and divisions between, major religions. Struggles have revolved around Catholic,

Protestant, Orthodox Christian, Jewish, and Islamic elements, drawing in political, social, and economic issues. Over much of the past 2,000 years, the Catholic Church has had an enormous amount of influence over large areas of Europe, including in the secular arena of national and European politics. In medieval times, the Pope was as much a political leader as a spiritual one, and heavily involved in the political machinations of the time. The division of the Catholic Church in 1054 led to a more “liberal” western faith and a more “orthodox” or conservative eastern faith, based in Constantinople, now Istanbul. The Crusades began in 1095, justified by Pope Urban II as a way for Christianity to pin back Islam, and continued for several centuries. The gradual expansion of Islam continued across North Africa, southern Spain, and the Balkans, until a critical battle outside Vienna in 1683 halted its path. After that time, the Ottoman Empire began to recede in terms of size and strength, leaving important pockets of Islam in the Balkans and European Turkey, and across North Africa.

The Reformation led by Martin Luther and John Calvin, as mentioned above, had an equally important impact on European life. The earlier consolidation of the Church of England by King Henry VIII in the 1530s led to a schism in British and European politics. This left a trail of war and destruction to today—Spain’s efforts to overthrow the English Crown through the Spanish Armada in 1588, and the troubles in Ireland (from the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 down to the present) being just two examples. The Netherlands fought the Eighty Years’ War for independence from Catholic Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some countries, such as Ireland, Poland, Italy, and Spain, have an identity partly fashioned by the widespread Catholic faith held by the vast majority. Although lingering religious animosities remain across Europe (the Balkans and Ireland as examples, as well as religious differences between Christians and Muslims in many states, accentuated by populist parties), it is possible to say that wars of religion are less likely today, though religion remains an important factor of identity.

Those of the Jewish faith have always been in a minority within Europe, and over time large communities gathered together in cities such as Berlin, Paris, and Kraków, partly for security. Persecution of Jewish minorities within Europe has been regular and matter-of-fact, on cultural and political grounds. In history, one of the more famous episodes is the Spanish Inquisition, dating from the 1480s (and this included forcing Muslims also to convert to Christianity), but there are many others of note. Persecution reached its nadir in the holocaust of the 1940s, when millions of Jews died in German concentration camps. Hitler’s thoughts were clear: “The Jew is the great agitator for Germany’s destruction. The trend of thought in Jewry is clear. It is to . . . rot away German national intelligence, and so crush the forces of German labour. . . . The National Socialist movement must

see to it that in our own country at least the deadly enemy is realized.”³² The holocaust significantly altered the presence of Jews in Europe, as many survivors fled to the United States or Israel. Eighty years on, Jewish communities have revived across the continent, though still much smaller than in the 1930s, and anti-Semitism is growing, often linked to the growth in populism.

The State

The contemporary global state system owes a large part of its development to events in Europe. Efforts to minimize religious interference in territories, combined with the desire of local leaders to formalize their control over citizens (and tax them) led to the establishment of the respect for borders and temporal leaders and princes. This trend was formalized in 1648 at the Treaty of Westphalia, then under Prussian rule, at the end of Europe’s Thirty Years’ War, which was fought over religious differences in Central Europe. The principles underpinning the state included the concept of sovereignty, there being no higher authority than the ruler of the land. The principles also included the need for legal recognition by other sovereign states, inviolable territory and borders, and a population over which the leaders could exert full control.

The European state system evolved over centuries and was not a simple process.³³ Although these principles of statehood gained legal and conceptual acceptance, states willingly disregarded them whenever they wished to invade another country, but they remain the basis today for European relations. Breaches of these principles in Europe are now rare and, when they do happen, they are widely condemned, such as with Russia’s invasions of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022.

Europeans did not recognize initially the existence of sovereignty outside of their continent, and so continued into the twentieth century their occupation and colonization of foreign lands and peoples. In time, these territories were consolidated into states by European occupiers and granted independence, and international organizations such as the League of Nations and the United Nations became the primary mechanisms of recognition of states. The development of the European Union is a novel attempt to alter the concept of sovereignty, though to date states remain central to our understanding of European politics.

Ideologies

Much of the language of politics that we use today—the “isms” of ideology—traces its intellectual origins to Europe. *Nationalism*, so prevalent in the contemporary world, traces to the actions of Napoleon in the late eighteenth century, and the igniting of opposition to French aspirations of domination across

Europe. The unification of Italy in 1865 and Germany in 1871 are important examples, and the hypernationalism of Europe in the first half of the twentieth century is testimony to the lethal force of such ideas. The devastation caused by such intense nationalism contributed to the search for ways after 1945 to minimize and mitigate such tensions, and this led to the concept of *supranationalism*, or the giving up of some national sovereignty to promote the cooperative venture of the European Union.

The language of *liberalism*, both economic and political, developed out of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, although its political roots go back much further. The signing of the Magna Carta of 1215 in Britain indicated a desire to rein in kings, their heavy taxation, and their military adventures, and this normally acts as a starting point for considerations about democracy. It was several hundred years later, however, before anything resembling a contemporary democracy would emerge. The prevalence of democracy across Europe today is one of the most important shared attributes of European states, and a *sine qua non* for entry into the EU as part of the Copenhagen criteria.³⁴ For many CEE states, their first true experience with democracy came only after the end of the Cold War in 1990, so there are significant differences across Europe. Russia and Turkey normally face exclusion from recognition as European because of their lack of democracy along with their geographical location.

Alternative conceptions toward management of the state and its political economy are evident in the competing ideologies of *conservatism*, *liberalism*, and *socialism*. These provide intellectual strength to the issues of European political development, but also contribute to significant turmoil. *Classical liberalism*'s growth through the work of Adam Smith and David Ricardo in the late eighteenth century offered an explanation and rationale for the expansion of British trade and global power through ideas of free trade and comparative advantage, and contributed to more economic reforms within the rest of Europe.

Conservatism, shaped by the writings of the English politician Edmund Burke, tended to be the overarching political force on continental Europe for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as empires were reluctant to offer much in the way of democratic reform or change. This ideology also underpinned the Concert of Europe system of the nineteenth century in keeping stability and stifling reform. World War I swept away many of the empires, and created newly constituted countries in the center of Europe. Increasingly repressive conservatism quickly quashed widespread hopes of liberal development, culminating in the growth of *fascism* in Germany, Italy, and Spain. Extremism in the politics of the 1930s was another nadir for political development in Europe, and *totalitarianism* left an indelible mark on the conscience of the continent and the world.

At the other nominal end of the political spectrum stands *socialism* as initially propounded by Karl Marx, a German who spent much of his adult life in Britain. Socialism made little inroad into the vocabulary of Europe during the nineteenth century, despite the social upheaval and revolutionary activities of 1848. It was the devastating impact of World War I in Russia, along with the inept and callous rule of the Russian royal family, which provided the environment for the 1917 Russian Revolution, an event that catapulted socialist ideology into the mainstream European political arena. The schism in European politics widened during the 1920s and 1930s, as Joseph Stalin gained total control of the USSR. Hitler's rise in Germany in the 1920s was partly fueled by a common fear of the impact socialism would have there, along with the frailty of the fledgling Weimar Republic.

As the two totalitarian countries of Germany and the Soviet Union faced each other in the 1930s across the weak territories of Eastern Europe, there was (at least with hindsight) a certain inevitability of a clash between them. The nonaggression pact signed between them bought each time to prepare for war, and the German invasion of Russia in Operation Barbarossa in June 1941 started what was to be the most brutal conflict in European history. It would be wrong, though, to see this war as simply a clash of ideologies: rather, it was a battle for land, resources, and control of Central and Eastern Europe—and, to a considerable extent, the whole of the continent.

Today, *social democracy* is an ideology and a form of government that many in Europe embrace. Social democratic parties since 1945 have controlled the governments of Europe in equal measure to conservative parties, and many conservatives embrace the core tenets of social democracy, including universal health coverage, collective bargaining, and progressive taxation. At the extremes, the radical Marxist left fared reasonably well in parts of Europe (France, Italy) in the postwar era, but declined significantly after 1989. Conversely, the radical right had little traction in the postwar era (with major exceptions such as Portugal and Spain), but gradually gained in strength since the early 2000s, especially in countries such as Austria, Belgium, France, and, most recently, Germany. Here, these parties draw from a nationalist reaction to the perceived overarching presence of the EU, as well as to the increasing number of migrant workers. The pull of nationalism is still strong in influencing the political outlook of many Europeans.

Capitalism

Capitalism has transformed itself over the centuries within Europe, and intertwines itself with parallel developments in ideology and social progress (or

perhaps in a Dickensian sense, the lack of it). Small-scale local employment gave way to guilds of artisans, but the arrival of capitalist production displaced them. The timing of this varied across Europe. A rough rule of thumb is that it developed in Britain—symbolized by the writings of the Scotsman Adam Smith with his 1776 publication of *The Wealth of Nations*—at the end of the eighteenth century and spread eastward, but this was uneven in time and impact, and capitalist activity was certainly present before 1776. Not all of Britain, for example, equally industrialized, as the scandal of the Irish potato famine of the 1820s exemplifies, where millions died from starvation in what was then the world's wealthiest country (as Ireland was a part of the UK then). Industrialization did not get to Russia and pockets of Eastern Europe until the twentieth century, and even then in limited form, though Czechoslovakia was one of the leading industrial powers in Europe in the 1930s.

In a similar vein, Europe's participation in, and creation of, a global capitalist system was uneven. European trade expansion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—led in different periods by Venetian, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and British forces—provided an early push toward the modern global capitalist system, but geared itself more to slavery and the simple exploitation of resources. The brutal slave trade helped to generate the wealth in Europe on which capitalism flourished. Over time, European colonialism more fully integrated territories into a capitalist marketplace, and further expansion into Asia and Africa in the nineteenth century consolidated this. The empires operating within Europe displayed a different emphasis of global capitalism to those outside the continent. The Austria-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, for example, maintained elements of feudalistic rule within their European territories, and economic exploitation followed a historical pattern similar to previous centuries. European empires in Africa, on the other hand, exhibited blatant exploitation of raw materials, cash crops, and people to fuel the burgeoning European economies.

The social impact of capitalism was complex. On the one hand, it brought great wealth and prosperity to elites within Western Europe and, allied to wealth brutally extracted from overseas colonies, pushed countries to unprecedented heights of economic development, exemplified by the boom in the great cities of Berlin, London, and Paris. Extraction also occurred in artwork and artifacts plundered to benefit European galleries and museums. On the other hand, those countries in the east of Europe lagged badly in economic development and industrialization. Capitalist development also brought misery to countless millions of workers, drawn into cities and workplaces far from beneficial to their health. The gradual yet uneven expansion of workplace protection legislation helped, but did not dissipate the inhuman impact of the modern economy. Industrial development also led to pollution at chronic levels not seen in Europe

before, and these high levels of pollution continued well into the beginning of the twenty-first century. During the Cold War, industrial production in the USSR and Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe—though not on traditionally capitalist grounds—also decimated local environments through intense levels of pollution.

Capitalist development transformed the transportation systems and technology of Europe, supplanting canals and water transport to bring the railway to the fore in the nineteenth century as the major mode of transportation.³⁵ The military implications of this were also immense, as World War I was to prove, with key decisions leading to war partly based on the rail transportation of troops. In Western Europe, transportation systems linked to the ports and the rapidly growing transatlantic trade routes. In the east, the relatively slow development of rail communications further hampered economic development, and reliance on waterways for transportation weakened trade as those routes tended to flow eastward and away from the vibrant markets of Western Europe.

The impact of capitalism in changing society and the workplace—the “factory”—contributed to the growth of trade unions and social unrest in many parts of Europe at the end of the 1800s and into the early 1900s. The writings of Marx, though not widely available at the time, provided an intellectual assault against the excesses of capitalism. The extent of a European workers’ solidarity was limited, but there was some development of cross-national workers’ movements at the turn of the twentieth century. This led to the belief that workers’ solidarity would prevent them from fighting each other in a major European conflict. The jingoism and exhilaration with which European workers enlisted and marched to the battlefields dashed these illusions, and showed how shallow any pan-European identity was in 1914. The carnage of World War I was cruel punishment for European workers, but the economic nationalism of the 1920s and 1930s served to divide and subjugate further the national workforces of Europe.

Colonialism

The year 1492 remains an important date in European history with Christopher Columbus’s “discovery” of the New World for Europeans. This event is symbolic of a growing expansion of European political and commercial power around the world, the development of a global economy centered on European power, and the growth of European empires that were to stretch around the globe. It also symbolizes Europe’s arrogance of power and its complete, vicious disdain for the peoples that it occupied. There is a case to make that the past 500 years exemplify Europeans’ perception of preeminence in the world, but that self-image came to an abrupt halt after World War II. The legacies of

such influence are widespread, and continue to evolve. They include cultural influences, such as the use of European languages in far-flung areas around the world—English in the South Pacific, French in the Caribbean, Spanish in South America, and Portuguese in Southern Africa—to strong economic and political ties. Many of these former colonies remain dependent on Europe for development assistance, and a small minority continues a formal connection to the European metropole in a legal sense.

Not all European countries were global colonizers, as touched on earlier. Some, such as nineteenth-century Austria-Hungary, focused their colonizing efforts within Europe. The Scandinavians had jostled with each other for power and territory over the centuries, but remained with little outside of continental Europe, except Greenland and Iceland. The Dutch were early pioneers of colonization as Europe's leading global power and trader in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—helping shape their desire for the creation of international law to protect their trade interests—but were left in the twentieth century with scattered possessions in the Caribbean and East Asia (Indonesia). Germany was late into the colonial game, only unifying its own numerous principalities into a country in 1871. Its desire for a “place in the sun” burned brightly for several decades, but the League of Nations stripped Germany's colonial territories (e.g., Namibia and Togo) after the end of World War I.

Spain's colonial pursuits were largely concentrated in Latin America, where gold and religious converts were in abundance. Its control of territory through much of the continent, except for Brazil, lasted several centuries, but buckled in the early nineteenth century through a combination of internal revolt and competing interests from the UK and an emerging United States. Its last grip over parts of the continent was lost at the turn of the nineteenth century in Cuba and Puerto Rico at the hands of an aggressive and expansionist United States. Spain had few territorial interests in Africa outside of the extreme northwest (Western Sahara), although it retains possession of colonial enclaves today inside of Morocco. Portuguese exploits not only were in Latin America (Brazil), but were liberally scattered around the world, from Angola in Africa to Goa in India. Although Brazil prized its independence early in the nineteenth century, the Portuguese colonies in Africa were involved in major wars of independence, only breaking free in the 1970s, and then for some, such as Angola and Mozambique, plunging into decades-long and debilitating civil wars.

France and the UK were the other major imperial powers of Europe, with far-flung empires lasting for centuries. Each had parallel interests in the Caribbean, across Africa and the Middle East, and through parts of Asia and the Pacific. At times, the two powers cooperated in their colonial endeavors, whereas at other times they were mortal enemies. Such a history played out in their control of Canada and the United States, though these countries were relinquished much

sooner than most of their other colonial territories. The final defeat of the British in the United States at New Orleans in January 1815 was significant in this regard, though the British eased their pain by extolling their important victory (with needed allies) over Napoleon at Waterloo in the same year. The toll of World War I weakened their control over their empires, but the devastation of World War II led to rapid decolonization of the British and French empires. I discuss these issues of decolonization in depth in the following chapter.

A European Identity?

Is there such a thing as an unambiguous European identity? Are the component national parts stronger than the European whole? What, if anything, binds Europeans together? Are there differences in attachment to Europe at a technocratic-legal level than to a cultural and spiritual level? Such questions are difficult to deal with, but begin to get at the problem of trying to judge what constitutes a European, how to perhaps differentiate between insiders and outsiders, and how effectively the EU is generating a European identity. These are themes that I continue to raise and address in subsequent chapters, but can introduce here.

If one works through a checklist of cultural factors, it is difficult to see from where a common European identity emerges. For example, language, religion, or ethnicity do not provide anything that Europeans share.³⁶ In poll after poll, the majority of European citizens outside of the Benelux core (Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg) do not fully align themselves with the EU or the broader concept of Europe. They do see themselves broadly, however, as citizens of Europe in addition to citizens of their own country, so with multiple identities. For example, a Eurobarometer survey in 2020 found about 70 percent of EU citizens polled felt comfortable perceiving themselves to be citizens of Europe, which is different from having an attachment to the EU. Not all Europeans normally approve of the major legislation of the EU, such as the introduction of the euro currency in 2002, or the European constitution in 2003. Despite some notable efforts at winning popular support, the EU administration in Brussels is aloof from everyday Europeans, and so has little ability to garner greater support for a European consciousness. Although the EU bureaucracy is often perceived to be all-powerful and menacing to Europeans, it accounts for only about 1 percent of European GDP, and operates on a small budget and with a small bureaucracy. With only twenty-seven members, the EU itself is not synonymous with all of Europe, especially in terms of the distinctiveness of Russia and Turkey, as well as the UK after 2020.

At a vaguer, more philosophical level, it is possible to suggest some factors that might tie Europeans together in a common consciousness beyond simple

geographical proximity. The history of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the two world wars in the twentieth century can possibly provide some sense of a shared experience. The impact of these events, however, was different in various parts of Europe, and so is difficult to judge in any concrete fashion. For the wars in particular, there were winners and losers, and so the experience (and memory) of these differed markedly. There are modern cultural events that bring Europeans together in competitions, such as the Champions League football/soccer season, the Tour de France cycling, and the Eurovision Song Contest. These are, however, insufficient to create a common identity and, if anything, pit countries (or competitors identified as representatives of their country) against each other. There are few examples where Europe fields a common team—the Ryder Cup in golf perhaps—but these have limited impact in building a European consciousness. When the European Commission entered its own song into the Eurovision Song Contest for the first time in 2021, there was significant opposition to this example of Europeanness. The resounding victory of the Ukrainian entry in the 2022 contest, however, displayed an emotive level of European solidarity and togetherness brought about by the depth of opposition to Russia's invasion of that country.

A country's perception of Europe and a shared identity links to its own historical and cultural experiences. So, for example, the UK's lukewarm support for Europe is understood in terms of the country's own history of perceived separation from continental Europe, geographically and figuratively, and a sense of superiority to the rest of Europe. Similarly, Russia's attachment to Europe appears to ebb and flow in history depending on numerous factors, not least the whims of the rulers at the time. The thrust for membership in the EU by a number of countries in CEE has perhaps less to do with a longing to share a European identity, and more to do with economic and security considerations.

Overall, then, the concept of a developing overarching European identity is problematic, and continuing national identity within Europe remains prevalent. As one survey bluntly put it, "People have no sense of a 'European character'—a set of characteristics that are common to Europeans. There is no equivalent to the set of myths or stories that make up national identities. There is no overarching narrative that makes sense of European history or the European project."³⁷ The EU seems unable and unlikely to dislodge states and national interest. Such issues receive further discussion in later chapters. There are arguments that Europe had more of a common identity during the nineteenth century than today. Then, it was possible to travel freely across Europe, trade within the region as a percentage of total trade was as high as it is in the twenty-first century, and some semblance of linguistic unity—at least for the elite—existed through the common use of French. The two world wars and the intense nationalism of the interwar period, combined with the Cold War division of Europe after 1945 and the renewed

nationalism and subnationalism post-1989, have all arguably served to undermine a common European spirit—the best efforts of the EU notwithstanding.

The EU has succeeded in creating a mountain of common objectives and policies, codified in numerous treaties and the *acquis communautaire* (which roughly translates from French as the “acquired law of the community”), the body of laws that is at the heart of the EU, and to which all potential new members must agree prior to entry. Covering tens of thousands of pages, or thirty-five chapters now for negotiations with Turkey and other candidates, the *acquis* displays successful agreement on common policies.³⁸ All this does not come easily, however, and is normally the result of massive bargaining and dealmaking among the member states. In the earlier days of the EU, all members held a potential veto over all policies. Increasingly, as I show later, a system of qualified majority voting has been introduced, but even here policies are often boiled down to the lowest common denominator to gain approval—and can still be blocked by a national veto, especially by one of the larger members. An increasing trend in the EU has been for members to opt out of various aspects of legislation—such as defense, immigration, and the euro—so that there is a multispeed or differentiated EU, whereby member states are formally pursuing different objectives with different partners with different levels of enthusiasm.

At a more general level, however, one can make the case that the EU has helped to define a common policy agenda for Europe, and in many areas has successfully harmonized EU objectives and policies. At a specific level, we can talk about policies on competition between companies, and the liberalization across Europe of such economic sectors as transportation and telecommunications. The European Commission acts as the watchdog to make sure that EU members (and significantly those outside who trade with the EU) play to the same rules. At a broader level, it is possible to argue that the EU has helped to foster common political goals for the whole of Europe—democracy, capitalist economic development, social welfare, peace—and though vague, these are nevertheless worthy goals to pursue and achieve. How well the EU27 can maintain a focus on common objectives remains a question for later discussion, though clearly there are continuing policy divergences.

Another question to raise is the extent to which the EU is likely to become a United States of Europe, a federation of states resembling the federal United States. The term *the United States of Europe* has been around for a long time, perhaps first coined in the modern era by Winston Churchill soon after the end of World War II. Of course, in an involuntary way, many Europeans have been forced into a united Europe in the past, dating back to the Roman Empire. Churchill’s view, like many others, was of a Europe loosely linked by economic and political commonalities, but not a federation in the sense of a single country or government or culture. That supranational view, however, is prominent among

many of the political elite in Europe, dating back in the modern era to Jean Monnet, one of the founders of the EU. The voluntary relinquishing of sovereignty to create a United States of Europe gained ground as a specific policy objective, and has many concrete successes. These include the removal of national frontiers across much of Europe, the adoption of the euro currency by nineteen states, and the increasing governmental role played by the EU institutions in Brussels.

There are numerous limitations to this idea, however. Probably the single most important distinction is in the cultural area, where linguistic differences between Europeans make any true “United States” hard to imagine. Because of these differences, media coverage tends also to be language- and nation-based, hindering a more pan-European perspective. Although English may become the lingua franca of Europe (despite the UK’s departure from the EU), national languages remain central.³⁹ It is highly unlikely that a federal European state will emerge whose system of government is similar to that of the US model. Whereas that might have seemed a distant possibility in the EU of six members, it is hard to imagine in the EU27 or beyond. Indeed, framed somewhat cynically or just realistically in a long-term historical perspective, the EU is perhaps just another transitory attempt to garner peace and unity in Europe after a war, with limited chance of permanence.

Conclusion

This chapter introduces some common themes and questions to form a basis for later chapters in the book. Besides offering a quick overview of the continent, it explored ideas of European culture and identity, bringing in a longer-term historical perspective. Agreeing on the exact boundaries of Europe is difficult, but a working definition was chosen to utilize the membership of the Council of Europe, including Russia and Turkey, as the basis for our discussions. The chapter also took note of the fluidity of Europe’s borders and political movements, and the multispeed movement in the direction of democracy. In the next chapter, I build from this platform to explain contemporary Europe in terms of the legacies of key events from the twentieth century. Such a framework is necessary to understand many of the important elements of European politics today.

Notes

1. In general, when we refer to *states*, we are discussing territorial units with sovereignty, legal recognition, a government, and a population controlled by laws. Although not technically correct, the terms *state* and *country* can be interchangeable.

2. Gerard Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995). For a helpful animated map of Europe over the centuries, see Nick

Routley, “How the European Map Has Changed over 2,400 Years,” *Visual Capitalist*, October 28, 2021, <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/2400-years-of-european-history/>.

3. The word “Balkan” loosely translates from Turkish as mountain. For historical maps of Europe, see Euratlas-Müssli, “History of Europe,” <http://www.euratlas.net/history/europe/index.html>.

4. Robert Sapolsky, “This Is Your Brain on Nationalism: The Biology of Us and Them,” *Foreign Affairs* 98(2), 2019: 42–47; see also Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

5. Milada Anna Vachudova, “Populism, Democracy, and Party System Change in Europe,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 24, 2021: 1–28; see also Madalina Calance, “The Resurgence of Nationalism in the European Union,” Centre for European Studies Working Paper 4(1), 2012: 24–34, <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/198153/1/ceswp-v04-i1-p024-034.pdf>.

6. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

7. James Burnham, *The Machiavellians* (Chicago: Gateway, 1943), p. 252.

8. Thomas Christensen, Knud Erik Jørgensen, and Antje Wiener, “The Social Construction of Europe,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 6(4), 1999: 528–544; see also Thomas Christensen, Knud Erik Jørgensen, and Antje Wiener (eds.), *The Social Construction of Europe* (London: Sage, 2001).

9. Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 13–15; see also Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell, *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1966).

10. Gabriel A. Almond, Russell J. Dalton, and G. Bingham Powell Jr. (eds.), *European Politics Today* (New York: Longman, 1999), chap. 2.

11. Thomas Denk, Henrik Serup Christensen, and Daniel Bergh, “The Composition of Political Culture—A Study of 25 European Democracies,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 50(3), 2015: 358–377.

12. World Bank Data, “Land Area (Sq. Km.),” <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.TOTL.K2>.

13. United Nations, “Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Population” (New York: United Nations, 2022), <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/database/index.asp>.

14. Russia’s Far Eastern Federal District has a population of more than 6 million.

15. Besides Turkey, other candidate countries for EU admission are Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. Moldova and Ukraine submitted formal applications for EU membership immediately following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In a largely symbolic gesture, the EU advanced both to candidate status in June 2022.

16. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, www.unece.org.

17. United Nations Department for General Assembly and Conference Management: Regional Groups of States, <https://www.un.org/dgacm/en/content/regional-groups>; also Worldometers, <https://www.worldometers.info/geography/how-many-countries-in-europe/>.

18. Gergana Noutcheva, Karolina Pomorska, and Giselle Bosse (eds.), *The EU and Its Neighbours: Values Versus Security in European Foreign Policy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

19. The name is the “English Channel” in English; the French simply refer to it as La Manche, the channel, or the sleeve. Conversely, the Channel Islands are known in French

as Les Isles Anglo-Normandes. Scientists estimate that the channel physically appeared only about 8,000 years ago. In terms of technicalities, the term *the United Kingdom* includes Great Britain (England, Scotland, and Wales) and Northern Ireland. For ease, I will use the UK and Britain interchangeably, and note that in this usage “Britain” also includes Northern Ireland.

20. Union for the Mediterranean, <https://ufmsecretariat.org/>.

21. Paul Kubicek, *European Politics*, 3rd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), chap.1. See also Anthony Pagden (ed.), *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press/Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002).

22. Council of Europe, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/46-members-states>.

23. World Bank Data, “Population in Total,” <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>.

24. See the Country Profiles section at the end of the book for further details.

25. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

26. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (New York: Norton, 2020), p. 46.

27. Martin Wight, *Power Politics* (London: Pelican, 1979), p. 137.

28. For coverage of the core factors in this sweep of European history, see Walter C. Opello Jr. and Katherine A.R. Opello, *European Politics: The Making of Democratic States* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2009).

29. Andreas Wimmer, “Why Nationalism Works: And Why It Isn’t Going Away,” *Foreign Affairs* 98(2), 2019: 27–34.

30. This defeat also contributed to the rise of the Paris Commune, one of the most radical movements in French history, the discussion of which still divides the left and the right in French politics.

31. For a discussion of many of these issues, see José M. Magone, *Contemporary European Politics: A Comparative Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), chap. 2.

32. Adolf Hitler, *My Struggle* (London: Paternoster Library, 1938), pp. 247, 252.

33. Opello and Opello, *European Politics*.

34. European Union, “European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations: Accession Criteria,” https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/glossary/accession-criteria_en.

35. The railways also necessitated having a common timetable on which the trains would run, so this changed time from being set in localities on a national basis, to an internationally accepted time in the 1880s based on London (Greenwich Mean Time).

36. There are twenty-four official languages in the European Union.

37. Mark Leonard, *Making Europe Popular: The Search for European Identity* (London: Demos/Interbrand, 1998), p. 17.

38. European Commission, “European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations: Chapters of the Acquis/Negotiating Chapters,” https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/glossary/terms/chapters_en.

39. The term *lingua franca* means an intermediary or bridge language used to communicate. Historically, it literally meant “language of the Franks,” or language that West Europeans used in trade across the Mediterranean and the Middle East. It then comprised a mixture of Greek, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Arabic, and Turkish. The language was used for centuries. Today, English has taken its place as an intermediary language.