

## The Political Bond in Europe

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### Abstract

This paper takes up the question of what holds a political community together, explored in the specific case of contemporary Europe. Departing from the culture- and values-based approaches that were the mainstay of the EU ‘demos debate’, the paper advocates a practice-oriented perspective that looks at how people position themselves in discussion vis-à-vis political problems. The concept of a ‘political bond’ is proposed as a normative ideal with which to raise important questions for empirical study to do with how collective problems are described, whom they are assumed to affect, and the extent to which they are assumed susceptible to remedy. These questions are explored in further depth using group discussions with taxi-drivers in Britain, Germany and the Czech Republic.

A question which has often been neglected in political theory concerns the composition of the 'people' who are to make up a political community. What must they have in common such that it makes sense to them to be ruled by the same institutions? Traditionally the question could be sidestepped with some ease: populations were constituted simply by the ability of a power-centre to coerce them into obedience, and where force alone was not sufficient to do this some notion of the power-centre's divine legitimacy would be invoked. As Margaret Canovan has put it, 'much the most common solution has been rule by one man at the head of an army, buttressed by as much support from religion as could be mustered.'<sup>1</sup> Arguably the question gathered its potency only after the French Revolution, with the emergence of the idea of popular sovereignty. Nationalism can be considered one response to it.<sup>2</sup> Despite (or because of) the low esteem enjoyed by the nationalist principle in the post-War period, few theorists have attempted to theorise in depth this notion of 'the people' which their discussions of social justice, legitimacy and representation tacitly presuppose.<sup>3</sup> One body of work which *has* tackled this question directly is that which addresses the specific case of the European Union. As the external borders of the Union have been pushed back, and as more policy fields have been 'europeanised', a large number of scholars have become interested in the question as to whether a corresponding European people does or can exist.

Initially, in the early years of the integration process, it was widely felt that this question could be resolved by furthering the economic interests of individuals and interest groups. Market interaction and functional integration would create significant rewards for the majority, in particular the elites, thus securing their allegiance to the integration process by means of a market bond.<sup>4</sup> This liberal vision of aggregates of self-interested but satisfied individuals persists today in legalistic approaches which, referring to what might be called a juridical bond, emphasise the generalised individual advantages to be had from granting, in the form of citizenship and the possible creation of a constitution, new sets of rights at the European level.<sup>5</sup> Generally, however, as economic growth has slowed, and as the Union has become more explicitly political with the advent of majority voting in the Council, there has been a move towards focusing not only on individuals and their bonds to the state but also on the kinds of bond which might exist between them. One line of thinking has highlighted the importance of shared cultural features (be these religion, language, 'traditions', or belief in shared descent), and the possible role of these in constituting a cultural bond that can foster trust and solidarity and giving meaning to membership of a European polity.<sup>6</sup> In another approach, shared values have been put forward as an alternative basis for a bond between peoples, often with the suggestion that these be incorporated into a

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<sup>1</sup> Canovan, Margaret. 1996. *Nationhood and Political Theory*. Cheltenham: Edwin Elgar.

<sup>2</sup> Interesting comments on this are provided by Singer, Brian C. J. 1996. "Cultural versus Contractual Nations: Rethinking Their Opposition." *History and Theory* 35.

<sup>3</sup> This observation has been made by Canovan throughout her book, and forcefully on pp.1-2; by Singer, by Kratochwil, Friedrich V. 2001. "The Politics of Place and Origin: an Enquiry into the Changing Boundaries of Representation, Citizenship and Legitimacy." *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 1.) by Yack, Bernard. 2001. "Popular Sovereignty and Nationalism." *Political Theory* 29.), by Mouffe, Chantal. 2000. *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso. and by Smith, Rogers M. 2003. *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. The literature on nationalism is a notable exception, on which more below.

<sup>4</sup> For one articulation of this view see Monnet, Jean. 1963. "A Ferment of Change." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 1.p.205. See also the work of neofunctionalist scholars such as Ernst Haas and Leon Lindberg.

<sup>5</sup> The European Commission has tended to push this argument, e.g. in debates about citizenship and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. See Wiener, Antje. 1998. *'European' Citizenship Practice: Building Institutions of a Non-State*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

<sup>6</sup> See Grimm, Dieter. 1995. "Does Europe Need a Constitution?" *European Law Journal* 1., Miller, David. 1995. *On Nationality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, Miller, David. 2000. *Citizenship and National Identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press., Smith, Anthony. 1992. "National Identity and the Idea of European Unity." *International Affairs* 68..

constitution.<sup>7</sup> These theoretical propositions have been accompanied by empirical research exploring whether citizens of the Union exhibit a 'European identity' and of what features this might be composed.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst this focus on the common is undoubtedly an improvement on the individualist-liberal emphasis on interests and rights, which is liable to generate, as Charles Taylor puts it, no more than 'fair-weather friends',<sup>9</sup> it is not without its own problems. Keen to avoid charges of essentialism, those who posit a cultural- or values-bond tend to emphasise that it is the *perception* of commonality rather than some objective commonality which is important. Applying this observation to the particular case generally leads to difficulties however: either it entails rather open speculation about what may or may not be in people's heads (how 'European' they feel, etc.), or it involves latching onto the empirical referents (language, myths, symbols etc.) which are taken, usually on the basis of historical precedent (in particular, the emergence of the nation-state), to govern the behaviour of the collective – a move which may be seen as a lapse back into determinism. As Barry Barnes has written, as a more general social-theoretical observation, 'two major difficulties are routinely associated with this approach. One is that ideas, beliefs, norms, and so forth are conceived of as being internal to individuals, and hence as invisible entities, all descriptions of which are bound to be highly conjectural. The second is the fact that these entities almost invariably serve as the basis of questionable passive actor theories of order and agreement: the entities are presumed to have fixed and definite implications, which those who cleave to them are obliged to enact.'<sup>10</sup> It is notable that these cultural- and values-based perspectives do tend to lead to rather strong statements, either along the lines that the necessary cultural attributes are found only at the national level, or that there is already existent a set of values which are identifiably European.<sup>11</sup> A large body of empirical research meanwhile takes up the challenge to discover what lies in people's heads, using quantitative data designed to measure attitudes to Europe and the European Union.<sup>12</sup> Amongst its drawbacks, the method invites an idealistic understanding of beliefs as unitary things existent prior to contextual interaction, it contains the in-built bias towards the idea that people possess developed orientations towards Europe / the EU, and furthermore these are frequently accorded an explanatory role as regards opinion-formation and political behaviour, despite the fact that their very existence can only be hypothesised.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> C.f. the idea of 'constitutional patriotism', Habermas, Jürgen. 2001a. "The Postnational Constellation and the Future of Democracy." in *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*, edited by Jürgen Habermas. Cambridge: Polity, Habermas, Jürgen. 2001b. "Why Europe needs a Constitution." *New Left Review*, Habermas, Jürgen. 2002. "The European Nation-State and the Pressures of Globalisation." in *Global Justice and Transnational Politics*, edited by Pablo de Greiff and Ciaran Cronin. Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press.; Weiler, J.H.H. 1995. "Does Europe Need a Constitution? Demos, Telos and the German Maastricht Decision." *European Law Journal* 1.; Cronin, Ciaran. 2003. "Democracy and Collective Identity: in Defence of Constitutional Patriotism." *European Journal of Philosophy* 11.. For a useful review article see Wagner, Peter, and Heidrun Friese. 2002. "Survey Article: The Nascent Political Philosophy of the European Polity." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 10..

<sup>8</sup> For a review article of this literature see Kohli, Martin. 2000. "The Battlegrounds of European Identity." *European Societies* 2..

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, Charles. 1989. "Cross Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate." in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, edited by N. L. Rosenblum. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press. p.175.

<sup>10</sup> Barnes, Barry. 2001. "Practice as Collective Action." in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, edited by Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eike von Savigny. London: Routledge.pp.17-8.

<sup>11</sup> For a critique of this kind, see Wagner, Peter, and Heidrun Friese. 2002. "Survey Article: The Nascent Political Philosophy of the European Polity." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 10. For critique of Miller's emphasis on 'shared values, shared tastes or sensibilities', see Canovan, Margaret. 1996. *Nationhood and Political Theory*. Cheltenham: Edwin Elgar. p.72. She herself generally avoids these problems with her notion of nationhood as a 'mediating' phenomenon, but has not been a contributor to the European debate.

<sup>12</sup> For one review of this literature see Gabel, Matthew. 1998. "Public Support for European Integration: An Empirical Test of Five Theories." *The Journal of Politics* 60.

<sup>13</sup> More specific to the field, there has probably been over-reliance on the polling data produced by Eurobarometer, an agency designed to have a performative effect on its target populations (nudging them towards the idea of a 'European identity') as much as to generate material for scholarly analysis. On this see Shore, Cris. 2000. *Building Europe: the*

There is also a normative reason for being sceptical of the emphasis on shared culture, shared 'identity' or shared values. Such approaches have a totalising tendency: it is but a short step to the proposition that all those who supposedly share the same culture, identity or values also share a single, substantive common good, and that all those who do not easily align with this culture / identity / values, or who choose to dissociate themselves from it, must be in collision with this common good. As Chantal Mouffe has argued, the 'modern form of political community is held together not by a substantive idea of the common good but by a common bond, a public concern. It is therefore a community without a definite shape or a definite identity and in continuous re-enactment.'<sup>14</sup> To seek embracing commonality, other than a basic commitment to the democratic way of life (to the principles of liberty and equality), is to seek an homogeneity which might well require a degree of repression to achieve.

There is another approach with which to study the make-up of the political community, one which focuses not so much on that which people are presumed permanently to share (the 'things inside them') but on patterns in the way they *do* things, that is, on diverse, observable practice. Claus Offe has provided one lead here, highlighting the importance of whether the populations of EU member-states exhibit a 'willingness to demonstrate trust and solidarity' towards each other.<sup>15</sup> His approach, addressed to what one might call a 'social bond', has the merit of focusing not on individuals, as interest- and rights-based accounts do, and not on collectives defined by abstract principles, as those focusing on cultural or values bonds do, but on a site of activity which mediates between the individual and the collective. Aside, however, from a footnote or two concerning patterns of charitable donation, Offe maintains his argument at a quite general historico-sociological level, and by no means exhausts the potential of a practice-oriented approach for thinking about political community in Europe.

This paper puts forward a practice-oriented approach of a different kind, focusing on discursive practice, i.e. how people talk, as the site of activity to be explored.<sup>16</sup> Political community is explored in the assumptions which are made in discursive interaction. Normatively, in light of the remarks above, there are good reasons to seek an explicitly political type of boundary-formation, centred on the appraisal of common political problems, rather than one appealing to neighbouring principles such as culture or values. As a normative ideal, one can imagine that important elements of such a bond might be the following. Firstly, there would be the assumed existence of a political common, i.e. collective public problems which are in need of address. Secondly, there would be an act of collective positioning on at least some of these problems such that they are assumed to affect 'people like us', and this assumption of 'shared predicament' should be matched by the positioning of those who are assumed not to share these problems (the opponents) as, in the language of Mouffe, adversaries to be convinced or defeated, rather than enemies to be destroyed. Thirdly, there would be the assumption that seeking to address these problems is a worthwhile political project, since if substantive justifications for political institutions are to make sense to people there must be the expectation that collective problems are susceptible to remedy.<sup>17</sup>

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*Cultural Politics of European Integration*. London: Routledge.. Qualitative research has been rare in EU studies: for one of the few (mainly) qualitative studies, see Díez Medrano, Juan. 2003. *Framing Europe : Attitudes to European integration in Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom*. Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press..

<sup>14</sup> Mouffe, Chantal. 1993. *The Return of the Political*. London: Verso.p.67

<sup>15</sup> Offe, Claus. 2000. "The Democratic Welfare State: A European Regime under the Strain of European Integration." *Political Science Series, Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna* 68. p.6.

<sup>16</sup> On this shift away from ideas and values and towards discursive practice, see Swidler, Ann. 2001. "What Anchors Cultural Practices." in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, edited by Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eike von Savigny. London: Routledge. For an exposition of so-called 'site ontology', see Schatzki, Theodore R. 2002. *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

<sup>17</sup> A welcome emphasis on the question of justification in the European context has recently been given by Morgan, Glyn. 2005. *The Idea of a European Superstate: Public Justification and European Integration*. Oxford: Princeton University Press.. He, however, is exploring the possibility of a single, general justification for the EU, and therefore

Addressed as it is to the framing of public concerns, one might refer to this as a *political* bond. Even sketched as an ideal, it does not of course resolve all the tricky problems of political community. It provides no final word on the question of community membership, nor clear criteria by which to exclude people. (Nor, it should be noted, do those other kinds of bond we have outlined, for the Wittgensteinian reason that rules do not contain the rules for their own application. Membership, as Canovan suggests, is an ‘inescapably contentious practical matter, not to be settled by theoretical stipulation.’<sup>18</sup>) Furthermore, since in this approach the common is made up of (the appraisal of) specific political problems, the community which it posits will always have an evolving and potentially contingent character. While, if one holds that antagonism is constitutive of the political,<sup>19</sup> there will always be political problems of some kind, precisely what kind will change with time, and the contours of political community will change accordingly, in ways hard to predict. There is no reason, however, to assume that such a bond would be any more transient than the other kinds of bond we have discussed: whatever the ostensible solidity of a cultural principle of membership, notions of cultural belonging are always in a process of renegotiation, perhaps ever more so under conditions of ‘globalisation’, and their boundaries of inclusion evolve with time.<sup>20</sup>

This paper does not seek to theorise the political bond in some abstract or universal sense (it is not clear how this could be done, given that positioning is a subjective matter) but to treat it as a *problématique* with which to raise useful questions about political community in the specific context of contemporary Europe. In what follows, the three main elements of the *problématique* are developed in further depth with reference to a small-scale, exploratory empirical study based on a series of group interviews with taxi-drivers in Britain, Germany and the Czech Republic. Methodologically, the study rejects the quantitative approach taken by the bulk of literature in the field and instead associates itself with the discourse-analytical stream of what has been termed the ‘practice turn’ in contemporary theory.<sup>21</sup> This means abandoning the quest to find ‘identity’ in the supposed mental attributes of individuals. It is held that there is no definitive description to be given of the mental phenomena which give rise to the articulation of opinions, since these are underdetermined by the opinions themselves. Putting mental phenomena to one side, and abandoning thereby the attempt at causal explanation, one can nonetheless investigate phenomena which appear at the level of the text, namely the patterns of assumption and argument which can be identified in discursive interaction. Rather than directly eliciting opinions about Europe and the EU, the purpose is to study the reference-points which are invoked spontaneously in discussion of political problems. It might be thought of as a ‘listening exercise’. However, no pretension to scientific neutrality is made: as with the study of any textual unit – including ‘frames’, ‘discourses’, ‘repertoires’ and ‘resources’ – the researcher plays an active interpretative role in the identification, prioritising and narrativising of the units, and a strong emphasis is therefore placed on the exploratory character of the research.<sup>22</sup>

Group interviews provide a good site for the study of discursive assumptions since they involve participants interacting with each other as well as a researcher. They exhibit processes of

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diverges from those who assert that the modern political community is (and should) be characterised by a plurality of substantive goods; c.f. Mouffe above.

<sup>18</sup> Canovan, Margaret. 1996. *Nationhood and Political Theory*. Cheltenham: Edwin Elgar., fnt. 9, chap. 7, p.81.

<sup>19</sup> C.f. Mouffe above.

<sup>20</sup> On the insufficiency of cultural representations of the people, see Cronin, Ciaran. 2003. "Democracy and Collective Identity: in Defence of Constitutional Patriotism." *European Journal of Philosophy* 11. and Markell, Patchen. 2000. "Making Affect Safe for Democracy?: On 'Constitutional Patriotism'." *Political Theory* 28.

<sup>21</sup> See in particular Schatzki, Theodore R., Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eike Von Savigny. 2001. *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*. London: Routledge.

<sup>22</sup> While practice-oriented approaches have the advantage of addressing behaviour which is observable, they should be strongly distanced from behaviourist aspirations to neutral science. On this see Barnes, p.20.

problem-definition, argumentation, consensus-formation and dissent.<sup>23</sup> For this study, groups of four taxi-drivers (occasionally three) were assembled in cafes and pubs for discussions of up to two hours. Interviews were conducted in ten cities in Britain, Germany and the Czech Republic between October 2004 and August 2005.<sup>24</sup> The choice of countries corresponds to the so-called 'logic of diversity': a large country on the periphery of Europe and traditionally a 'reluctant' participant in European integration, a large continental country at the heart of the integration process from the beginning, and a post-communist country which has undergone rapid political change and which acceded only recently to the Union. Taxi-drivers were chosen on the supposition that their conversation may exhibit in concentrated form the kinds of assumption which are frequently made by lay people. On the one hand their profession puts them in a position of heightened sensitivity to a wide range of political developments. They are amongst the first to be affected by changes in prices or spending behaviour, by the arrival of immigrant labour, by increases in criminal behaviour or by new policing tactics. On the other hand they are also exposed to a wide range of opinion stimuli (in particular newspapers and the radio, and the experiences of others as narrated to them on the job), mitigating against the possibility that theirs is a speech community isolated from the rest of society. Also, the *self-understanding* of many taxi-drivers is arguably as people of common sense and practical wisdom; unlike, for example, students, academics or perhaps artists, they show little tendency to emphasise their personal originality by formulating opinions which consciously diverge from those they hear around them. Furthermore, they have no reason to be unusually favourable or hostile to the EU. They also belong to a socio-economic space which, from most ideological perspectives, is politically important: that which extends from the working class to the lower-middle class. These are the people which political movements have to engage so as to be politically important, and their discursive interaction may indicate the resources which are there to be mobilised and the assumptions which may inhibit their mobilisation.

### The political common

The interviews were loosely structured. Some topics were placed on the agenda by the researcher using thematic index-cards, and approximately the first twenty minutes of each (two-hour) discussion was taken up by a card-arranging exercise designed to explore which problem areas 'go together' and to elicit the concepts used to connect them.<sup>25</sup> Thereafter, in free discussion, participants were encouraged to talk in more depth about whatever political problems they considered significant. Both sections provide the basis for some reflections about how to conceptualise the political common as it relates to our argument. Of particular interest here was whether people in discussion do identify collective, public problems in need of address (i.e. a political common), and if so in what patterned formations these problems tend to be clustered together.

In the Wittgensteinian tradition, rule-based behaviour is understood not in terms of the application of predefined rules to given situations but rather as competence in practice, the capacity of

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<sup>23</sup> For discussion of the group-interview method, see Gamson, William. 1992. *Talking Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., Bloor, Michael, Jane Frankland, Michelle Thomas, and Kate Robson. 2001. *Focus Groups in Social Research*. London: SAGE., Millward, Lynne J. 2000. "Focus Groups." in *Research Methods in Psychology*, edited by Glynis M. Breakwell, Sean Hammond, and Chris Fife-Schaw. London: SAGE. and Puchta, Claudia, and Jonathan Potter. 2004. *Focus Group Practice*. London: SAGE..

<sup>24</sup> The cities were Reading, Swansea and Norwich; Lübeck, Kassel, Würzburg and (in the former East) Erfurt; Plzeň, Liberec and Ostrava. All interviews were conducted by the author in the local language.

<sup>25</sup> This technique follows the guidelines laid out in Coxon, Anthony. 1999. *Sorting Data: Collection and Analysis*. London: SAGE.. The seventeen cards used consisted of two images and a verbal caption each. The English-language versions of the verbal captions were as follows: Peace & War, Treatment of Outsiders, Overseas Aid, Medical Care, Education & Training, The Legal System, Policing, Health & Safety Standards, The Environment, Science & Research, Transport, Money & Prices, Purchase of Property, Markets & Production, Taxation, Corruption, Work.

‘knowing how to carry on’ in a given situation.<sup>26</sup> In the context of these interviews a key question was whether, when supplied with the topic cards, the participants knew how to ‘carry on’ with them, to develop these basic materials into some kind of ordered discussion. This kind of competence is of course an intersubjective thing: one looks for it by studying not the monologues of individuals but whether, and when, the participants seem to ‘understand’ each other and are able to develop each others’ points; one looks, in other words, for agreement in practice, both within groups and across groups.<sup>27</sup> The topic cards were just a starting-point; the important thing was how they were used, how some were neglected and how others were followed up. The political common would be made up of that body of problems frequently invoked and on which discursive competence and patterned ways of talking were apparent.<sup>28</sup>

A brief look at how the interview at Lübeck developed should serve to clarify this point. Having explained the protocol for the discussion, the participants were invited to think about how best to order the prompt-cards laid out on the table:

JW: Perhaps you could spend a couple of minutes thinking about how these cards might go together. If you had to make little groups out of them, how would you do so? There’s no right or wrong way, whatever seems natural.

J: How many groups should it be?

JW: Up to you, up to you. [90 seconds]

J: So, what would I say ... start with the economy, with Taxes ... they belong together, right? ... Markets and Production are directly linked with Taxes because taxes can strengthen or weaken the economy. And ... Science and Research ... also has something to do with the economy, because innovation strengthens the power of the economy.

W: Yeah, I’d also put those together. And Work too.

J: And Work too.

The vocabulary on the cards is not being clumped together aimlessly, it seems: Jürgen creates a small narrative to explain the relationship between them, and his narrative is validated by Wolfgang’s interventions, which are in turn accepted by Jürgen. When asked to summarise the collection of cards with a title, the group chose ‘Occupation and the Economy’ (having considered the possibilities ‘Markets and the Economy’ and ‘Working Life’), giving an indication of the concepts assumed to link these topics. Of further interest is what happened a few minutes later: the card ‘Money and Prices’ had for some reason ended up in a different pile, but questions started to be raised as to why. Jürgen said that he felt at the beginning it should have been placed with ‘Occupation and the Economy’; Niklas, Ali and Wolfgang agreed, and it was moved over. The episode suggests the momentum generated by the placing of cards is not so strong that it cannot be overturned by arguments that appeal to common expectations of what goes with what.

When asked to go into further depth on the problem areas considered to be of most significance, Jürgen invoked once more ‘the economy’ and, with the active support of Wolfgang and Niklas, used it to link together a whole series of concepts which had not been written on any of the cards: ‘I think the biggest problem here in Germany at the moment is the economy. [W: yeah] The economy and work of course. Unemployment and ... zero economic growth, or hardly any economic growth, and the unemployment which goes with that. Domestic purchasing power, the lack of domestic purchasing power.

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<sup>26</sup> See e.g. Barnes, op cit.

<sup>27</sup> One also relies of course on one’s own competence as an interpreting actor.

<sup>28</sup> By pattern I do not mean strict repetition and regularity. Schatzki is correct to applaud Foucault for having realised that ‘that the unity of a discourse does not lie in the repetition of the same objects and concepts, but instead in the possession of delimited diversities of them.’ Schatzki, Theodore R. 2002. *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press. p.13.

Also under this heading with money and prices I'd say the introduction of the euro is very relevant, because the euro – due to the exchange rate – has brought disadvantages in purchasing power, considerable ... [N: price rises] ... Yeah, it's led to price rises, and so also the purchasing power, the domestic demand, has gone down, because people have less money at their disposal.' Some notion of 'the economy' or 'economics' clearly comes across here as an organising concept, a core element in the political common along with the more specific problems associated with it. A later cross-reference (this time by Wolfgang) suggests the naturalness with which the participants orientate themselves in discussion using the concept of 'the economy'. The conversation had been looking at the problem of inadequate contributions to the system of health insurance: 'The easiest solution for this problem would be full employment. If there weren't five million unemployed people there, if they were paying into the pension and health insurance, then we wouldn't have all these problems ... [N: yeah]. We're back to this first subject again – the economy. It all links together.'

Across all the groups in the study, one finds participants constructing a domain of problems to do with economics. Not all groups, of course, when asked to label the card piles formed at the beginning of the interview used the word 'economics' or its functional equivalent in the relevant language. A range of candidate titles was generated, perhaps all with a family resemblance to the word 'economics', but with enough variety to suggest a plurality of ways of constructing the domain. 'That one is easy,' said Onřej in the Liberec group of the card pile formed out of 'Money and Prices', 'Taxation', 'Markets and Production', 'Work', 'Health and Safety Standards' and 'Purchase of Property'. 'It's a question of everything to do with finances. It's the cost of living, it's consumers, it's prices ... it's everything to do with finances.' A brief debate ensued with the other participants as to whether the best title is 'Financial problems', 'Financial Situation' or 'Financial System', but agreement formed quickly that 'they're basically the same'. Some groups made a distinction between the more daily or personal aspects of economics and the larger-scale or more remote aspects, although these were generally strongly enmeshed in the subsequent discussion. The Reading group had no doubts that the pile they had formed using the cards 'Markets and Production', 'Work', 'Purchase of Property', 'Money and Prices' and 'Taxation' was 'all to do with money', and this was taken as the title. In an interesting twist, the Erfurt group labelled the three cards 'Markets and Production', 'Taxation' and 'Purchase of Property' with the heading 'Capitalism', a term frequently invoked also by the Ostrava group.

One concludes that an important domain of problems making up the political common has, despite the nuances, something more or less to do with economics. Economic problem-areas frequently discussed across the groups included wages, prices, unemployment, taxation and inequality, social security and insurance, the consequences of privatisation, state finances and the decline of industry and exports. (We set aside for now the nuances between countries – amongst the Czech groups, for example, the quality of banking services were discussed with particular frequency.) Using the same analytical techniques, two other problem domains can be proposed as being constitutive of the political common for the people interviewed. One might be called 'Relations between Peoples', and would span the administrative and analytical distinction – a distinction made rarely in these discussions – between foreign policy and domestic intergroup relations. Key problem areas would be intergroup conflict and perceived threat (internationally, and domestically at the street level), and the unwanted encounter with cultural otherness. Wars and terrorism were discussed with some regularity here (though considerably less so by the Czech groups, for whom the domain was perhaps not as salient). A third problem domain would be to do with the breaking of legal and social rules and might be referred to as 'Society and the Law'; recurrent problem-areas were crime, corruption, policing, justice, and the behaviour of individuals towards others in society. Both are explored in more depth in the following sections. While the categories 'Relations between Peoples' and 'Society and the Law' do not recur in the discussions with the same frequency as 'Economics', nonetheless the problems associated with them were linked up repeatedly. A potential fourth domain of problems – which one might refer to as 'Quality of Life' or 'Health', covering problems like pollution, the purity of the water-supply or the meat that goes into sausages – was hinted at in various discussions, but not developed sufficiently to warrant further examination here.



These domains can be considered important components of a political common because when participants discussed them it was as collective problems, problems liable to affect ‘people like us’. This does not mean that all participants necessarily linked themselves to them as individuals: as taxi-drivers, none of the participants was unemployed or liable to be made unemployed in the immediate future, certainly not by the factory closures which were so often mentioned. It was not a problem liable to affect ‘me’, but it was nonetheless a problem that could affect ‘people like us’. Likewise, a majority of the participants in the Reading group were first- or second-generation immigrants, but immigration was still something which they positioned themselves as being concerned about. Interviewing groups other than taxi-drivers would no doubt have resulted in some different problems being brought to the fore and certain others being marginalised. The political common is shared not in the absolute sense of problems shared by all at all times, and with the same opinions held, but in the sense of a common set of reference-points around which collective, we-oriented subjection-positions are generated in discussion. The ‘we’ would most likely be constructed differently by different social groups, but one would still want to speak of a political common insofar as there was a ‘family resemblance’ in the reference-points invoked.

### Collective Positioning on the Political Common

Of interest, then, is who is assumed, for the different problem domains, to be ‘the people like us’ who are affected in a certain way by these problems, and in what way other groups of people are described. Who is positioned as ‘our faction’, sharing in our predicament, and how are other factions constructed?<sup>29</sup> Sensitising concepts with which to approach the source material are those of adversary and enemy, and of ‘we’-subject positions and ‘our counterparts’, where the latter are those with whom comparisons are drawn because they are assumed to be facing the same problems as ‘us’. One finds different assumptions in the three principal domains that have been highlighted; a passage from the Würzburg discussion contributes to our reading of *Relations between Peoples*:

U: I recently read again how the British are supposed to have trashed the Germans [in newspapers like *The Sun* and *The Daily Mirror*]. I said to myself, well, you know, I’m not going to get caught up in this hysteria. I’ve met enough British people and I’ve always got on really well with British people and I think it’s all rubbish. Racism or whatever, it’s basically stupidity I think ... [R: yeah]. Because ... think about it, what is the difference between a British person and me? Basically there’s none at all. He was born over there and I was born here.

O: They’re partly blood-related, through the Angles and Saxons ... they also had German origins. [...] As far as what he’s saying, with the Germans and British, I don’t see that as a problem at all. The only thing which I see as a problem in Germany is the religion issue, Muslims and Christians ... [U: yeah]. That’s the only, fundamental problem, that Muslims are anchored here in the society, and on the one hand the women behave and dress like German women and on the other hand there’s the danger of attacks. Muslim fundamentalism ... [R: yeah, yeah]. And anyone, if he wants to, can commit a suicide attack here. You can’t even expel them any more, because a lot of them are already German citizens.

U: You have that problem as well, especially in London. The same problem.

O: ... In the whole of Europe ... the Netherlands ...

R: Yeah, exactly ... they’re getting the same in Britain too, that’s right ...

U: ... The same problem ...

O: ... Britain ... London ... Very difficult. A lot of Muslims there too ...

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<sup>29</sup> For one reading of ‘positioning’ see Davies, Bronwyn, and Rom Harré. 1990. "Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 20. The notion of subject positions is also found in the work of Mouffe and various strands of discourse theory.

U: ... And they're also perverse. And the problem is, OK I'm generalising a bit, if you have a hundred Muslims, one makes an attack, but the other 99, who know about it, they don't speak up. They're harmless, sure, but they wouldn't say anything even if they knew, I think. That is the danger [R: Yeah, I agree ...] For everyone, for the whole western world, whether it's Germany or Britain or the US. I really see that as a problem.

R: It must be very pronounced in France too, I think the problem there is even greater. In France, because of the close connection with Arab countries ... Algeria ... Marocco etc.

The problem is formulated here, one may summarise, as the presence of intransigent and potentially threatening Muslims or Arabs within the local environment. As places where people encounter these problems, Germany is highlighted, and comparisons are made with Britain / London, the Netherlands, France, 'the whole of Europe', and also the US. The people affected (the subject positions) are constructed as 'Christians' and more generally those of 'the western world'; a little later in the discussion they are described as 'the white race', and the mention of a blood relation between Germans and British is highlighted here. The differences between them are downplayed; they are not identical of course (a comparison between them is necessary), but they are assumed to be counterparts in this context. This is typical of the interviews as a whole: when *Relations-between-Peoples* problems are discussed, whether in domestic or international terms, the boundaries of shared predicament correspond to something like 'the west', occasionally with racial connotations ('the white majority'), and often with connotations of good sense and peacefulness.<sup>30</sup> They tend to be demarcated against Arabs or Muslims, who are portrayed as uncompromising and aggressive (with the religious dimension often emphasised). They are generally presented as posing an existential threat to the subjects – 'they want to destroy the whole western world,' says Uwe elsewhere to Rainer's agreement. They are treated, in Mouffe's terminology, as enemies, and this tends to lead to calls for firm action against them, as we shall see in the next section. It is perhaps particularly problematic that these enemies are assumed to be present not just beyond the borders of Europe but close to home in the city itself.

In the discussion of *Economics*-related problems, the subject positions are different and the range of comparisons slightly narrower. As liable to be affected by problems like price increases, taxation, lost jobs etc., one finds comparisons made between 'this country' and other countries in Europe of a similar level of economic development, in particular neighbouring countries (proximity inviting the assumption of similarity). For the British and Germans this means western Europe, while for the Czechs it means countries of central and eastern Europe such as Poland, Slovakia and Hungary. Hardly any comparisons are made with the US or Australia, unlike for *Relations between Peoples*. As subject positions one hears much talk of 'working men', 'those who contribute their share', 'the little people', or (particularly from the British) 'those in the middle'. These are demarcated against opponents such as 'the rich' (often abbreviated to 'shareholders'), 'the skivers' who avoid paying their taxes or social-security contributions, and 'cheap workers' from eastern-European countries who are willing to work for lower wages – the East starting, for the Czechs, a little bit further to the east than for the British or Germans. Note that these demarcated groups do not overlap with those mentioned for *Relations between Peoples*: Muslims are not invoked in connection with economic problems, and eastern Europeans are not invoked when the discussion is about conflict or cultural otherness. The opponents in the *Economics* domain tend to be portrayed more as a cost rather than an existential threat: disliked, but their presence grudgingly accepted. They resemble adversaries rather than enemies, to be encouraged to adapt and contribute their share.

In discussion of problems to do with *Society and the Law*, there are no transnational comparisons. The focus is firmly on 'the city', with occasional comparisons with other cities in the same country. As subject positions one finds 'those who play by the rules' (and are potential victims) and 'those who speak up for the rules'; when 'we' are occasionally positioned as rule-breakers

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<sup>30</sup> Countries within 'the West' are of course criticised occasionally, notably the US, but in these cases a distinction is often made between the country's leaders and its people, a distinction rarely made for other countries.

(something one finds in the Czech discussions), the rules in question are held to be very minor rules, perhaps even bad rules, such as speed limits which have been set too low. The opponents in this domain are the hardened criminals, the egotistical and (especially for the Czechs and the participants from the former-DDR city of Erfurt) the corrupt; some minority groups are mentioned as persistent rule-breakers, such as Turks in Germany and Roma in the Czech Republic. These opponents, to anticipate slightly the next section, are described as both adversaries and enemies: adversaries to the extent that they can be improved through education and public reprimand, enemies to be locked up in prison to the extent that they cannot.

Two important points emerge therefore. One is that the assumption of shared predicament takes a transnational form in two of the three domains under consideration, albeit something less than pan-EU in one (*Economics*) and something more than this in the other (*Relations between Peoples*).<sup>31</sup> The term ‘Europeans’ itself very rarely features as a subject position. The second is that the opponents are not always cast as merely adversaries but sometimes as enemies.

### The Political Project

As a basis for political community, the political bond would have to be something more than just the assumption of being faced by shared problems. In order to be fully political, there would need to be the assumption that a collective approach to tackling these problems would be feasible and worthwhile. In the European context, such a political project would presumably have to involve collective action at a European level. Europe-wide approaches would have to ‘make sense’ in principle, even if the Brussels institutions in their current form, and the policy-making they have given rise to, were assumed to be deficient in some way.<sup>32</sup> Some insights on this question can be derived from considering two related types of assumption found in the interviews: assumptions to do with what is relevant for explaining the problems discussed, and assumptions to do with the extent to which they are susceptible to remedy.<sup>33</sup>

Problems to do with *Economics* were almost always explained in broad, transnational terms. Local problems such as unemployment in the city, price rises or the decline of local industry tended to be attributed to factors extending well beyond Europe such as global inequalities in prices and wages. Murda at Reading made a typical connection: ‘Prudential [an insurance company], they’ve taken their call centres over to India. Why? Because it’s cheaper. Same with manufacturing. ... They pay pittance over there and we want minimum £10 an hour.’ The cheaper world further east, comprising Eastern Europe and Asia, was a common motif amongst all the country groups. The fact that these explanatory factors extend far beyond the local environment is probably an important reason why the possibilities for action in this domain are assumed by all the groups to be heavily circumscribed. For Hans at Kassel, ‘it was always going to turn out this way because we have multinational corporations. That means the companies have no limits at all any more. There are no borders any more.’ Inevitability is a common motif, particularly as regards price rises. Cost is assumed to be decisive: when Shafeek at Reading attempts to blame Thatcher for destroying British industry, Murda replies ‘it’s management sense, it’s nothing to do with Thatcher, it’s supply and demand ... it’s where you can get your goods cheaper. ... Unless you start paying everybody 10p an hour for their jobs, you can’t compete with other countries now.’ As a justification for industrial decline one hears not only the irresistibility of cheapness but also

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<sup>31</sup> Lest this seem too deterministic, it should be noted that there is always at least some flexibility in how an issue is problematised: a problem such as corruption can be presented more in economic terms or more in social/legal terms, depending on the discursive situation.

<sup>32</sup> C.f. the useful distinction made by Morgan, Glyn. 2005. *The Idea of a European Superstate: Public Justification and European Integration*. Oxford: Princeton University Press. between the ‘project’, ‘process’ and ‘product’ of European integration.

<sup>33</sup> Explanations and prescriptions tended to appear spontaneously in the discussions, but were also encouraged with interventions from the researcher, sometimes direct – ‘how do you explain that problem, why does it arise, what can be done about it?’ – and sometimes indirect – ‘who is to blame for this problem?’

the naturalness of change and evolution. When the Norwich group reports improvements at last in the northern-English economy, these are accounted for not so much on the grounds of a successful organised revival as on the idea that luck inevitably changes. 'We had no other choice,' says Mickey. Leyton is upbeat: 'With life ... I mean, you know as well as I do, with life itself, where one door shuts ...' Barry interjects: 'Another one will open.' 'A lot of it is out of this government's control', says Andy at Swansea. A consensus amongst the Würzburg group is that politicians are 'puppits' when it comes to the economy, and participants invoke the freedoms of democracy to argue that firms must be allowed to leave if they want to: 'because, what exactly is the government going to do?' asks Uwe. 'It's a democracy, you'd have to introduce some kind of dictatorship ... "You stay here, full stop. Otherwise you go to prison." ... You can't do it any other way, but what do you want to do in a democracy?' Rainer agrees – this kind of governmental interference would constitute 'authoritarian measures.' By the Czechs, further reasons for assuming limited agency are often supplied: their state has weak finances, and it is dependent on the health of neighbouring economies. Onřej at Liberec points to how economic conditions in Germany heavily determine those in the Czech Republic: 'we're starting at last to export more than we import from abroad, which is something positive for us, but if Germany ever gets into recession, that means business stagnates, then the problem is they don't want to buy our products, so we sell less. And Germany is next-door and it's our main neighbour, that's the problem. We're very dependent on the states around us.'

Explanations of problems to do with *Relations between Peoples* also tend to be wide in scope, with a sense of agency which is a little stronger. One common explanation for conflict is based on other peoples outside the West seeking to compensate for what they lack – in particular, power and resources. For Hans at Kassel, 'the crunch with this whole thing is that the distribution of resources in the world is very variable, and most wars take place due to this distribution. Whether it's basic economic goods like oil or other raw materials, or like's going to happen with water too ...' 'Normally,' Sebastian continues, 'the Earth is in a position to feed ten billion people and we're already six billion and we can't regulate it, so there's wars.' Even more common as a basis for explanation is the assumption that the actions of non-Western peoples (Muslims /Arabs in particular, with some mention of the Chinese) can be accounted for with reference to their supposed natural characteristics such as aggression, single-mindedness and intransigence, or their attachment to religion and 'ideology'. 'Muslims don't know how to compromise,' says Zdeněk from Ostrava, 'it's a completely different mentality.' Peter at Kassel meets with the agreement of the group when he says: 'the Muslims, they're in every country, and someday they're going to take over world supremacy. Because the potential is there. This fanatical belief is there ... So there's enough potential for war for the next hundred years.' Explanations tend not to include the people constructed as 'us' (the majority-people in western countries), since these are generally assumed to be peaceful and sensible. Perhaps due to this externalisation of responsibility, the possibilities for tackling these problems are assumed to be constrained. Rarely in these interviews does one find the idea that relations between peoples can be improved through some kind of 'dialogue' or better mutual understanding. 'You're never gonna stop war,' says David at Reading, and 'I can't do nothing about it.' 'Unless you can zap people for thinking,' says Mickey at Norwich, 'you will never ever have peace.' Instead, the idea of irreconcilable difference tends to be emphasised: for Peter and Dieter at Kassel, 'people's opinions are simply too different', and 'people are basically unable to tolerate other people's lives;' Dieter predicts 'the direct confrontation between peoples with completely different cultures.' Conflict tends to be normalised:<sup>34</sup> tackling these problems therefore tends to be presented as a matter of reducing mutual exposure. Strict immigration rules are often assumed to be the most credible answer, although accompanied by doubts about whether the national government would be willing to do this. 'Everyone's afraid to step on them', suggest Andy and Lee at Swansea, and amongst the German groups this concern is entwined with discourse on the country's history: German politicians are afraid of

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<sup>34</sup> This should not be read as evidence in support of a 'clash of civilisations' or 'clash of peoples' thesis, since it is a quite separate question whether one would want to buy into the position that conflict between peoples is unavoidable.

being called fascists. 'You're not immediately a Neonazi when you talk about the subject,' says Jürgen at Lübeck. 'But a lot of Germans that I've spoken to think there is a problem with foreigners here, and they'd really quite like to have a party here in Germany which is a little bit more to the right, which makes laws which ... [Wolfgang: yeah] are a little bit tougher, but which don't immediately end up in the far-right corner ... [Wolfgang: In the brown corner.] ... in the brown corner, exactly.'

Problems associated with *Society and the Law* tended to attract explanations limited to the domestic, and generally the possibilities for action are assumed to be rather better. The focus is on the behaviour and mentalities of local actors, and explanatory factors for crime and social misdemeanour tend to include upbringing in the family, discipline levels in schools, and the willingness of the institutions of enforcement to fulfil their responsibilities for seeing that the rules are equally applied. Those who have been taught well at school 'know the difference between right and wrong', says Mickey at Norwich. Transnational factors are never cited here, even though one could in principle imagine references to the decline of religion in modern European societies ('no-one fears God any more') or the impact of technological change on local communities and family interaction.<sup>35</sup> Remedies for problems are also conceived as domestic: particular emphasis is placed on the potential of a good national education system for producing responsible and law-abiding citizens, and on a strong police and judicial system for enforcing the rules vigorously. Other members of society are assumed important to the extent that they can ostracise those that misbehave (like those who put their feet on the seats). The exception to this pattern of strong agency is found when the Czech groups discuss corruption: this tends to be attributed either to the communist generation or those who made money quickly with communism's fall, and in neither case is it assumed that much can be done about such people to change their behaviour: 'people brought up completely differently,' Míra at Plzeň calls them: 'you can only wait until they go off to their pensions and a new lot come along.'

These observations are directly relevant to our problématique of the political bond and its prospects at a European level. For one domain of problems, *Society and the Law*, the kind of political project deemed to make sense is one centred on the state government and the cooperation of local actors (teachers, police, magistrates, other citizens). Europe and the EU are simply not mentioned in connection with these problems. In connection with *Economics* and *Relations between Peoples*, they are mentioned, but often accompanied by a set of assumptions which minimizes their credibility as the focus for a worthwhile political project. In *Economics*, we have noted an assumption of weak agency generally; however, rather than seeing European integration even as an *attempt* to assert control over global economic forces, it is often assumed to be one more expression of those forces. A particularly clear example is found when Rainer at Würzburg talks about the recent enlargement of the EU:

The door was opened by us, to encourage development, and now there's this boomerang effect. The idea was to build up the markets there – that was the point of the thing I think, the enlargement of the EU – Poland, Czech Republic, Slovenia etc., to build up new markets there, so that the people there can also, how should I say, boost the economy here, so they can buy the products which are produced here. It was already noted even then – I can remember – in the political discussion that things would turn out as they have now, with this migration to the East. It was known even then, when all this was opened up. It was done anyway, and now ... you asked earlier what can be done about it, it sounds very hard and sad when I say it, but actually nothing. ... It has its own dynamic, the door has been opened and now it's open! You can't close it any more. So I ... the proposals that we could possibly make, they're of a theoretical nature, probably nothing will happen. Because the EU will carry on existing in its current form, the contributions and the subsidies will also be paid to the eastern countries just as up til now ... I don't believe that anything will somehow be dismantled there ... and the borders are open ...'

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<sup>35</sup> Only by recasting these problems as to do with *Economics* or *Relations between Peoples* are wider explanations brought in: some of the German groups link rising crime to an influx of people with supposedly more violent tendencies from the Balkans and Turkey, while in the Czech discussions problems of social disorder are sometimes linked to economic conditions such as the state's lack of funds for schools and policing.

The critical decisions are assumed to have been taken in the past, and even then with a sense of inevitability. Now – a common assumption – it is *too late* to reverse these decisions. As Dieter at Kassel puts it, ‘the train has left the station’. At Lübeck, Wolfgang says: ‘I find it really bad what that EU Directive says concerning the free movement of services, if that goes through, then Polish and Czech employees, also from Lithuania ... If they’re allowed to work with us here under their own conditions then no small entrepreneur here will be able to survive.’ When I ask what could be done to address this problem, Jürgen immediately ties the problem into a broader process: ‘Well, the world is heading ever more towards globalisation, and globalisation is ... in the future an equalisation between poor countries and rich countries ... And this process won’t be complete within the next few years, it’ll be very, very slow, it’ll last a really long time, until Uzbekistan has the same standard of living as we do, for example, as the Federal Republic of Germany. And then sometime far off in the distant future – fiction really – this problem will naturally be solved. But that’ll definitely take generations.’ Thus an EU policy is merged together with globalisation, understood as a painful and uncontrollable process. Jürgen continues: ‘many say we should go back, we should have the Deutschmark instead of the Euro, the borders must be ... the walls must be erected again, then everything will be better. But whether that’s the solution, I’d strongly doubt it.’ Niklas agrees, and Wolfgang remarks: ‘this process is no longer reversible.’ Amongst the German groups, for whom it is a present reality, and the British and Czech groups, for whom it is a prospect, the euro often comes across as the extension of a pattern: the motif of inevitability is transposed from the general assumptions made about economics to the particular case European economic integration. The Ostrava group talk of the euro as an impending ‘catastrophe’ for ‘the little people’, but one which is unavoidable nonetheless. Ironically, one almost senses that the euro itself becomes the basis for an assumption of shared predicament, as seems to be the case in the Norwich discussion:

B: If we’ve all got the euro, all of Europe including us, then everything’s got to be the same prices, like your petrol abroad, your petrol here, your fags, blah blah. And I’m pretty sure, whatever government is in in this country would never give up the revenue off cigarettes, beer and fags. So we’d be getting the same wages as our European counterparts but we’d be paying more, so our standard of living would go down yet again. [...]

L: They’ve all got mugged on the bloody euro, don’t you worry yourself about that. Because you go out to Spain and see how much it bloody costs you.

B: The Dutch don’t like it, the Germans are struggling with it.

M: I tell you who didn’t struggle with the euro – financial institutions. They made a packet on it.

When the EU is invoked in discussion of problems to do with *Relations between Peoples*, it is not generally as a means for addressing these problems. The main approach assumed to be available for minimising conflict – controlling the arrival of non-Western immigrants – is normally connected to national governments, although even in the discussion in which the most xenophobia was expressed (at Swansea) the possibility of a European approach was mentioned. ‘Why should Britain take more than all the other countries?’ asks David, ‘Are we stupid or what?’ Britain should take no more than its ‘fair share’, says Lee. Andy’s conclusion is: ‘if Brussels is supposed to be the centre of Europe and all the politicians are there, why can’t they turn round to Germany and say ‘well look, you *have* got to take some. France, you *have* got to take some ...’, you know what I mean, instead of putting them on the back of lorries and shipping them over here. Surely Brussels, if they’ve got all the power, should be saying ‘well you got to have some, you got to have some’, and spread it out, instead of them all coming over here.’ The possibility of some kind of European foreign policy was mentioned only in a couple of the German discussions,<sup>36</sup> and then with some scepticism, perhaps because many of the problems are assumed to

<sup>36</sup> Opinion polls often suggest that this is a policy-area that large numbers of people in EU member-states would accept being ‘europeanised’, but in these discussions such a proposition very rarely arose spontaneously amongst any of the country-groups.

extend into Europe already due to immigration rather than lying exclusively outside. That there might be a political project in opposing US power was an idea barely heard.

## Conclusion

The principal move in this paper has been to redescribe the question of peoplehood in terms of the normative ideal of a ‘political bond’, and to explore this problématique empirically with reference to the specific case of contemporary Europe. This act of redescription was intended to shift focus away from questions of abstract and uniform ‘identity’, whether supposedly inherited (cultural) or adopted (values-based), and to play up questions to do with the political. It was thus partly a methodological move (from attributes to practices) and partly a normative one (from harmony to diversity of substantive goods). Our observations, albeit based on a small number of interviews, suggest several conclusions about whether such a political bond could act as the normative foundation for a European polity.

That it might be possible to speak of a ‘political common’, or a ‘common focus of political attention’, is an idea which comes through unscathed. Collective problems are constructed with considerable fluency in these discussions, and in patterned ways such that one can speak of at least three important problem domains. This plurality of domains, in each of which different kinds of subject-position are constructed, may be something which itself is normatively attractive, since it implies – as the flipside of multiple acts of exclusion – multiple possibilities for inclusion. Those who are assumed not to be part of the ‘shared predicament’ in one problem domain may nonetheless be included in it in another. However, that the opponents in the *Relations between Peoples* domain tend to be presented as enemies is incompatible with the tolerance required in a political community, whether this community be centred on the EU or its constituent states. Attempts to suppress the *Relations between Peoples* domain due to its antagonistic dynamic would probably be unwise – especially given the frustration with mainstream parties expressed in several interviews for exactly this reason – but it might be possible for certain problems to be redescribed as to do with *Economics*, the domain most characterised by an agonist (friend-adversary) dynamic. However, new kinds of economic discourse which affirm the potential for agency would be needed, something which most likely requires disputing the tendency to explain large numbers of economic problems with reference to the dictates of a global market, and delinking the EU and its policies from a wider discourse of inevitability. A much stronger assumption of the potential for controlling economic problems at a European level would need to be fostered.

A full political bond, comprising not just the assumption of a political common and the tolerant construction of boundaries of shared predicament but also the assumption of the worth of a political project (national, European or otherwise) to address these problems, is present only sporadically in the discursive interaction we have studied. From the perspective of any conception of democracy thicker than the liberal variant, this should constitute a genuine problem, especially given the political awareness of the interviewees.<sup>37</sup> Creating such a bond requires making available new kinds of discourse on which people can draw, and doing this is of course a practice, not something to be advanced solely on the basis of theoretical reflection. If a political bond is to be made, it requires movements that can lead the process. Most likely, it requires movements which are explicitly political rather than social, which can offer a broad vision addressing multiple domains of problems, and which are committed to a political project. Our empirical findings suggest some of the frequently-made assumptions which would need to be challenged.

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<sup>37</sup> Of course, discussion in an artificially-convened context is only one kind of practice, and though one may be sceptical of the dichotomy of ‘what people say vs. what they do’, there is still a relevant question of how the practice of talking with peers in pubs relates to other practices in democratic-political life such as voting and participating in collective action. This is not however a question which can be pursued here.