

## **Book Review**

## David Michael Green The Europeans: Political Identity in an Emerging Polity

Boulder, COL: Lynne Rienner (2007)

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This book by David Michael Green is an empirically very solid book on the widely discussed question of an – emerging – European identity. Although written from the declared perspective of political science, this text is far more attractive than a lot of other publications in this field – which may reflect Green's seemingly anthropological research interests as well as his 'outsider' status as an American.

Green approaches his topic in a very broad way. In his introduction he discusses the general idea and potential role of identity. Although he neither defines this concept nor differentiates between individual and collective forms, he relates it to a range of important terms and discussions, such as nationalism, political identities beyond Europe's borders, or integration (what comes first: identity or polity?). Conceptually, he mainly refers to political identification within a normative frame. Chapter 2 gives a summarizing overview of the historical development of the very idea of European identity, with the central discussion revolving around the question 'Is a European identity possible at all?', particularly as it does not fit the classical nation-society-state nexus. In the following chapters, the author elucidates his empirical approach to this topic. Doing so admirably without any fear of possibly contradictory results, he includes an impressive amount of both quantitative and qualitative data. His main questions are "Are there any 'Europeans' in Europe?", "Who are the 'Europeans'?", "What does it mean to be 'European'?", and "How 'European' are the Europeans?". In other words, he is interested in (1) declarations of being 'European' (there are some, but it is a minority phenomenon), (2) the variance in levels of declared European identity (there are certain characteristics - nationality, political efficacy and instrumentalism being the most important ones), (3) 'nature and content' of European identity (bringing very different aspects to the foreground), and finally (4) in the depth of European identification (finding substantial amounts of willingness to risk and to sacrifice for Europe).

The main points he develops throughout his book are the processual character of any identity or identification, and the derived expectation that any possibly developing European identity is not likely to take the form of an – ideal typical and politically idealized – national identity. He assumes, for instance, that results of his research on European identity display a trend away from a rather emotional attachment towards forms of identity "built on cognitive calculations dispassionately assessing that which best serves the welfare of Europeans, based on the universalism of their shared interests" (p.150).

Logically, this type of identity presents itself as one that is able to coexist with other identities and even to 'celebrate diversity'. Green emphasizes the role of diversity, not only as a fact of European life, but also as a normative approach; for example, among certain groups of persons he interviewed, the theme of "diversity, multiculturalism, and tolerance (...) trumps every other notion of the meaning of European identity" (p.128).

Relating the early development stage of a European identity to the length of time national identities need to stabilize, Green is rather optimistic about the future consolidation of such a form of identity, taking into consideration the possibility that it seems highly "unlikely (...) that political identities will emerge from this period possessing quite the same characteristics with which they entered it" (p.153). The reason, he assumes, is the changing role of the state under the impact of globalization, leading to a more and more diversified landscape of units potentially relevant for political activity and identity: regions, nations, or large-scale regions like Europe. On this basis, he pledges for seeing "Europe today neither as an anomaly among identities nor as an example of typical identity development in its early evolutionary stages" (p.156). Rather, he supposes, we should think of identity as conceptually differently - as a 'post-modern' form of identification. Therefore, his aim is to go beyond the European horizon, looking at current and possible future forms of 'post-modern' large-scale identities in general. Although he does not give a thorough theoretical explication (according to the whole approach of this book), he summarizes a few aspects which he considers being key points or 'contemporary metacultural factors' to the question of how identities – or one type of them at least - could develop in the foreseeable future. Firstly, he mentions that this type of identity is compatible with diversity and multiplicity; secondly, quantitatively and qualitatively changing forms of communication lead to differentiations of group membership; thirdly, these identities "need to be built and maintained on a set of normative civic values, rather than on essentializing or 'primordial' characteristics, or as contradistinctions against an 'Other' of some sort" (p.158); fourthly, Green underlines the significance of diversity again; and finally, he states that "identities are increasingly likely to be the product of instrumental quid pro quo relationships (...), as opposed to socialized emotional responses to specified tribes and tropes" (p.159).

As much as this book is enjoyable – its theoretic deficits unfortunately lead to some oversimplifications, which in combination with normative assumptions result in a rather disappointing summary that neglects a critical discussion of identity concepts in general and the idea of a European identity in particular.

Nevertheless, despite its shortcomings, this book is an ideal start for anyone who wants to know more or to do their own research on the topic of European identity. There are two reasons for this: firstly, it is very easily accessible thanks to its coherent and often entertaining style, complemented by a large number of tables, and secondly, it represents a dense collection of well structured information which summarizes the most central questions about European identity in general.

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