IDENTITY, LEGITIMACY AND FOREIGN POLICY:  
SOME THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS AND THE TRANSATLANTIC RIFT AS A CASE-STUDY

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Introduction

In recent years International Relations (IR) theory has started to devote unprecedented attention to the role of norms, values and identity in foreign policy. Such a trend has reached also EU studies and has produced interesting attempts at analysing the peculiarities of EU foreign policy. A very debated issue is if the EU is really a “different and better” type of international actor (Manners 2002; Telò 2001). As a matter of fact, the EU has been claimed to be a “normative power”, a peculiar international actor which behaves differently because it is differently constituted through the history of the integration process; critics to this approach recall the Union’s many inconsistencies (Journal of European Public Policy 2006). In this debate, however, there is not much reflection on the relationship between the political identity of the Europeans and EU’s foreign policy. Identity tends to be treated as an attribute of the Union, rather than an attribute of a group of people. A gap exists also in the literature that specifically focuses on the identity of the Europeans (e.g. Maier and Risse 2003), that rarely makes reference to foreign policy, if not to mention the position that emerges in the opinion polls on a particular foreign policy issue. On the contrary, I believe that a relationship exists and it is one of the purposes of this paper to show which one it is both in abstract and applied terms.

The second purpose of the paper has to do with a further gap in the theoretically-informed literature dealing with EU foreign policy: an analysis of the relationship between identity and legitimacy in the area of foreign policy. EU legitimacy has been widely analysed in two of its three main meanings: it has been investigated as far as the EU democratic deficit (input/formal legitimacy), and the EU ineffectiveness (output / efficiency oriented legitimacy) are concerned, while it has been little investigated with respect to the evolving ability of the EU to justify its existence and to claim allegiance from citizens and member states on the basis of the political, social and civic values embodied in its institutions and basic policies (substantial legitimacy). Though there are important repercussions both of a lack of formal legitimacy in the formulation of common foreign policy (particularly as far as the security and defence sector is concerned) and of
clear weaknesses of the EU as an international power, I will concentrate on the relationship between substantial legitimacy, identity and EU foreign policy.

In the rest of the paper, I will first illustrate my position with respect to the relationship of political identity, legitimacy and foreign policy in general terms, and I’ll then apply the framework to propose an interpretation of the deep roots of the transatlantic crisis.

Reflecting on the link between political identity, legitimacy and foreign policy

Alexander Wendt had the merit to draw attention of the mainstream IR to the issue of identity. Following Wendt, a first wave of literature on identity focused attention on state / national identity treating it prevalently as a collective attribute. In Wendt’s view, identity is a ‘property of international actors that generates motivational and behavioral dispositions’ (Wendt 1999: 224). It represents a relatively stable (1999: 21) intersubjective structure within which a state defines its interests, role and expectations about Self. The state defines its perception of Self in interaction with relevant Others. Such a perception of Self, in turn, shapes its interests - therefore interests are defined by identity. However, according to Wendt, the state, which exists prior to interaction, has some interests which are independent form the social context – physical security, autonomy, economic well-being and collective self-esteem (1999: 235ff). A state has a ‘corporate identity’ – ‘the intrinsic qualities that constitute [a state’s] individuality’ (Wendt 1996: 50) and three other types of ‘social identities’: type, role and collective identities (1999: 224ff), which exist only in relation to others (taking the perspective of the others).

Wendt’s approach to the analysis of identity has a series of pitfalls which have been repeatedly denounced (Zehfuss 2001; Hopf 2002). I believe that the greatest limit of Wendt’s approach is the absence of reference to the peoples’ political identity. An anthropomorphific treatment of states and actors with an identity is by no means Wendt’s prerogative, rather it has become a rather popular practice in contemporary IR (Cf. Manners and Whitman 1998; Nau 1998): the practice is misleading and generates confusion with respect to true aspects of identity which pertain to the individuals. For this reason, I propose avoiding using the concept of ‘identity’ as an attribute of a state. Political identity may have a state as an institutional referent, but it is an attribute of individuals or groups. I will refer to what is frequently called ‘state identity’ as state ‘role’ (Cf. Holsti 1970; Walker 1987; Aggestam 1999). Roles refer to patterns of expected or appropriate behaviour and are determined by both an actor’s own conceptions about appropriate behaviour and by the expectations of other actors (Elgström and Smith 2006). The role-constructing side of the equation is ultimately shaped by an actor’s identity and the others’ expectations (Wendt 1999: 227-8). Ultimately role conceptions can be regarded as behaviourally related elements of identity
(Elgström and Smith 2006). However, being the ‘actor’ in question a political system in itself (a state, a polity like the EU), the ‘actor’s identity’ is not monolithic, but pertains to the political identity of the citizens. This means that the interaction through which a role is defined involves also the ‘domestic’ social level. Attention to the social dimension in a state’s identity / role is not frequent, as Ted Hopf has denounced (2002). Conversely, a similar lack of attention to the foreign policy dimension of identity building can be denounced as far as the literature on citizens’ political identity is concerned.

In my reconstruction what counts most for a state’s international role is the political identity of its citizens, a political identity which is also the structural context of meaning within which state representatives and decision makers shape ‘their appreciation of the world, of international politics, and of the place of their states within the international system’ (Weldes 1999: 9). Mine of focusing on political identity is a choice, as a large part of the literature focuses attention on cultural identity as the main form of identity behind a states’ role definition. Others attach to culture an ambiguous role. For instance Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein define culture as ‘collective models of nation-state, authority and identity, represented in customs or laws’ (1996: 52 and 56); i.e. culture is a collective model of identity and at the same time influences identity.

The idea that political identity is/should be based on a cultural identity is shared by many, although there are differences among the authors (A. Smith 1992; Rudolph 2001; Huntington 2004: 69). On the contrary, those who focus attention on political identity in the first place regard political identity as a construct that is not, and should not, be derived directly from a common culture. Drawing on Furio Cerutti’s work, I define political identity as ‘the set of social and political values and principles that we recognize as ours, or in the sharing of which we feel like 'us', like a political group or entity.’ (Cerutti 2003: 27; 2001; 2005). Recognition unfolds both argumentatively – e.g. when we read the Constitutional texts of our polity - and a-logically or symbolically – e.g. when we look at symbols such as the flag, the common currency. Furthermore, values and principles do not by themselves shape the political identity of the citizens: they need to be interpreted, ‘to be re-read and translated into the specific language of citizens, generations and communities.’ (Cerutti 2003: 28). Cultural identity is the framework within which such interpretation takes place. ‘Our’ specific interpretation of a value/principle is the result of our history (or, better, of the shared meaning attributed to such history), constitutional and legal practices, and coherence with respect to other shared values. Here I adopt a political-identity-first perspective and consider identity as the process of self-identification (Bloom 1990) of the

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1 In the 137 pages of a Final Report on identity in Europe reference to ‘foreign policy’ appears only once (Maier and Risse 2003: A-39).
individuals in a group. In this process policy, including foreign policy, is particularly important. The way we conceive our international role is functional to the way in which we conceive ourselves; at the same time, the way we ‘perform’ our role feeds back into our political identity (see fig. 1). Another feedback comes from the image that we see ‘reflected in the eyes and words of relevant others’ (usually others which we regard as sources of legitimacy). In this respect, ‘Others’ are relevant (cf. Rumelili 2004; Neumann 1996). The relevance of Others may also be ‘comparative’ - “else than me” or (with reference to one own’s past) ‘different from what I was yesterday’ - but not necessarily oppositional, as too frequently is assumed.

Fig. 1 The identity-interests-foreign policy circle

Political identity → role conception → foreign policy (role performance)

Interests

Others

Legitimacy is involved in this self-identification process in various ways.

1. In the first place, a foreign policy performance that denounces a lack of efficiency (output legitimacy) and produces a lack of credibility in the EU can affect the internal credibility on the EU institutions and ultimately generate an ideational crisis therein. This means that eventually a lack of out-put legitimacy can affect also substantial legitimacy crisis.

2. A similar effect can be produced by a serious deficit in formal legitimacy (in-put legitimacy), for instance in the case of a decision to authorise an EU (Belin Plus) peace-enforcement operation without an explicit authorization of the national parliaments.

3. Last but not least, substantial legitimacy intervenes directly in the self-identification process, by defining the realm of “appropriateness”, thereby setting the limits of legitimate behaviour. Should EU/Europe go beyond those limits, this too would produce an internal ideational crisis.

Legitimacy affects the self-identification process particularly when “domestic” politics is concerned, but are relevant also in the case of foreign policy.

However, the degree of impact of foreign policy and of these various legitimacy concerns on political identity differs depending on the degree of maturity of the group's political identity. This is an important element in the analysis of identity transformation, something which is usually neglected in the literature.

If the feedback from foreign policy to political identity is a normal component of the self-identification process, it becomes more evident when values are challenged, that is in cases of

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2 Arrows do not indicate causality but only influence.
ideational shocks. Below I will show how these processes have been at work in the US and the EU/Europe from the end of the Cold War onwards, contributing to the transatlantic rift, but also to rifts internal to the two actors.

Exploring the link: issues of identity and legitimacy behind the Transatlantic Rift

In the past few years, transatlantic relations have been under political strain and close analytical scrutiny. The rift - or ‘drift’ (Lindstrom 2004) - is multi-faceted and profound, involving both political elites and societies at large. When trying to explain the origin of the crisis, many scholars point to the end of the Cold war as a structural change at the level of the international system which has inevitably produced consequences on the existent system of alliances (e.g. Kruthammer 2002-3; Kagan, 2004; Cox 2005). Other authors pay more attention at the unilateral move of the Bush Administration (Daalder and Lindsay 2003), de facto denying the existence of an unavoidable link between unipolarism and unilateralism.

It is my opinion that both explanations contribute to understanding the origin of the current crisis, but that a structural analysis which prevalently pays attention to ideational structures gets a deeper understanding of the transatlantic clash. As a matter of fact, neither the redefinition of security concerns, nor the behavioural implications of power asymmetries (by the way, more or less pronounced according to the issue area) could be deterministically asserted on the basis of the new distribution of power, nor could be exclusively determined by the decisions of a US Administration, if such decisions had no ground in a at-least-partially-shared understanding of the country’s role in the world. On the contrary, the implications of the end of bipolarism were gradually drown through a series of responses to critical junctures in the 1990s and early 2000th (end of the Cold War, the Balkan wars, 9/11, Iraq). The main claim of this article is that these critical junctures represented different ideational challenges for Europe and the US, because of the different political identity of European and American citizens, in terms of both content and degree of consolidation. Such political identities defined the real of “legitimate”.

The EU/Europe

EU/Europe refers to Europe as a political area where political identity, interests and institutional mechanisms have been reshaped by the existence of the European integration process. There are three most striking features in this unprecedented process of polity-building which have implications for European political identity:

1. The gradual transformation of sovereignty. The EU integration process has progressively redefined sovereignty in the continent, originating an interesting pull & share of sovereignty among
different actors, which differs in different issue areas. This has had inevitable consequences on the way in which the absolute defence of sovereignty is perceived on the two sides of the Atlantic. As even Henry Kissinger has acknowledged, ‘The most important event in Europe is the progressive erosion of the nation state [...]. European diplomats seek to apply their new domestic experience in the international arena..... By contrast, America remains a traditional nation-state, insistent on sovereign freedom of action.’ (Kissinger 2004). Clearly, the transformation of the conception of sovereignty in EU/Europe’s political identity has implications on EU/Europe’s foreign policy, particularly as far as the creation and maintenance of binding international legal frameworks valid erga omnes, is concerned.

2. *The undetermined geographical borders.* The unclear geographic boundaries of the EU/Europe too are relevant for the process of a European political identity formation. The internal coherence of the process rests on the positive affirmation of a set of values whose political aim is to avoid a return to Europe’s precedent history – the real Europe’s Other (Wæver 1998), by means of admission of a growing number of “others” into the realm of “us”. This has clearly created opportunities for the integration process, but is also one of the most problematic elements in the design of a coherent EU enlargement policy.

3. *The transformative character of the integration process on pre-existent states.* The variegated literature on Europeanization (Featherstone and Radaelli 2003; Olsen 2002), both in its rationalistic and constructivist versions, shows how the EU political system affects the policies, politics, and sometimes polity of the member states and candidate countries. Both provide evidence that a process of Europeanization is underway, either as a result of simple learning (i.e. instrumental adaptation) or of complex learning (i.e. transformation not driven by instrumental rationality but by change in the belief system). Scholars involved in *Thematic network on Europeanization, Collective Identities And Public Discourses* (IDNET) found out that, though identification with and support for Europe and its institutions is highest among political and social elites, there is an interesting trend among the larger public towards adding the EU as a further layer of identity next to the national one, a trend reinforced significantly in the 1990s (Maier and Risse 2003). Moreover, such a new layer does not simply add to the others (national, local) but blends into each other. This implies that the European integration process (made of history, common institutions, processes of socialization and learning) does not “simply” produce an additional level of identification among the European public, but creates and identity element through which also pre-existent layers of identity are redefined, acquire re-new meaning. The process is by no means completed, but is underway and proceeds together with the integration process. This reinforces the fundamental idea of this paper
that the “polity-building” process and the “identity-building” process are strictly connected one to the other.

If we then investigate Europeanization at the level of the foreign policies of the member states, we gain some further insight on what characterises EU/Europe as a political entity. Michael E. Smith convincingly shows that though institutionalized EU foreign policy cooperation may have been created by intergovernmental bargaining, over time ‘states have increasingly learned to define many […] of their foreign policy positions in terms of collectively defined values and goals. […] Institutional mechanisms have both pre-empted the formation of fixed national foreign policy preferences and […] socialized its elite participants into articulating a common European policy [on an expanding number of issues]’ (M.E. Smith 2004: 99-100). Therefore, the existence of the European integration process, with its institutions, rules and actors has gradually become an institutional form that coordinates relations among states on the basis of generalized principles of conduct: i.e. multilateralism. Multilateralism has become a praxis of behaviour which represents normality, i.e. legitimate behaviour; defections occur, but are denounced as infringements of acceptable behaviour. The integration process, therefore, has produced an international actor that, despite not having the capabilities of traditional state actors, has distinct features and a certain degree of shared values (among elites and larger public) and interests which qualify it as a polity, although still largely in the making. This is the EU/Europe.

The EU/Europe is not a given entity, but rather something that has changed quite a lot through time in terms of geographical space, institutional assets and sharing of sovereignty. External challenges have frequently exerted fundamental pressure towards change, and this has been the case even more since the end of the Cold War. Suffice to think of the development in the in the foreign a security policy sector following the Balkan conflicts (innovations in the Amsterdam and Nice Treaties) and even the transatlantic drift on Iraq (the so-called Berlin Plus agreement with NATO; the European Security Strategy).

While these interesting developments took place on the operative ground, on the political field a severe crisis affected intra-European relations in 2002/3. Though the Europeans had demonstrated cohesion in their solidarity with the US after 9/11, and offered to use the NATO by activating article V, when Bush went for a coalition of the willing operation in Afghanistan, then proclaimed the existence of an ‘Axis of Evil’ in his 2002 State of the Union Address (Bush 2002) and declared a right to pre-emptive war in his 2002 National Security Strategy, the Europeans started to feel uneasy. Finally, EU member states divided sharply on occasion of the debate on the possible use of force in Iraq. Despite the fact that all European states supported the idea of a UN resolution on the issue, when the US decided to attack without a resolution, the European states diverged
dramatically. The events are too well known and frequently recalled to be discussed again here, what is interesting for us, however, is to recall that the European institutions and the European public took a very critical stance. Various political actors tried to show that a difference existed between the use of force in Kosovo and Iraq, although both occurred without a UN resolution.

But why have most of the EU/Europeans, a significant part of EU member states, and EU institutions so decisively opposed the US’s policy? My main claim is that it represented a challenge to values which give meaning to the EU as a political actor. Which values are we talking about? What are the values held by the Europeans and those endorsed by the EU? The World Values Survey (WVS) shows that West Europeans (the EU/Europe until 2004) score highly on both secular values and on self-expression values, that is, tend to be societies in which traditional religious and family values have ceased to be fundamental, and an increasing share of the population has started to shift its priorities from an overwhelming emphasis on economic and physical security towards an increasing emphasis on subjective well-being, self-expression and quality of life (http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/library/; Inglehart, Basanez, Diez-Medrano, Halman, Luijkhx 2004). Although there is a relevant distance among European countries on both axes of values (traditional/secular and security/self-expression), with northern countries scoring highest on both dimensions and southern Catholic countries scoring less, on average all Western European countries but Ireland appear dominated by secular/self-expression values. A representation which coincides nicely with the EU’s self-representation and practice.\(^3\) The EU’s values as summarized in article I-2 of the Constitution, include human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. Clearly, such values are not very different from those considered fundamental components of the ‘American Creed’. What is interesting in the EU context is the extent to which the EU’s self-representation as a qualitatively different actor in world politics is reshaping the interpretation of these values and defining the characteristics of a European political identity.

The EU’s effort concerning identity-building is a difficult one as, contrary to political identity in a nation state, the EU/Europeans are not a nation (and do not feel like one). The challenge is the identification of a set of social and political values which Europeans can recognize as theirs and which give meaning to the EU/Europe as a political group. With the European integration process national identity in Europe is no longer as clearly defined as in Waltzer’s representation (as a tribal identity), it is rather a process whereby people add a new layer to their national political identity characterized by ethnical and national anonymity but shared citizenship. A process, however, in

\(^3\) An example of the particular attention that EU institutions pay to the defence of secular values as a bulwark against discrimination and infringement of self-expression values is the 2005 rejection by the European Parliament commission of Rocco Buttiglione as EU Commissioner for having proclaimed that he considers gays to be ‘sinners’.
which there is an interesting osmosis between these two levels (elements of one layer pass on to the other), but also slightly different interpretations of the same value from different national perspectives. The results of the process are by no means clear, but the process is underway and the EU/Europe is involved in a constant effort to define ‘What it means to be European’, also by defining what it means to be European in the world. The EU’s definition of an international role, therefore, is part of the overall process of identity building in the EU/Europe, and at the same time it is the result of the Europeans’ self-representation. What is this self-representation as a world actor made of? The EU/Europe tends to represent itself in a way which in scholarly terms has been defined, in turn, as a ‘civilian power’ (Telò 2004), a ‘structural power’ (Keukeleire 2002), and a ‘normative power’ (Manners, 2002), that is, a polity which stands in the world in a qualitatively different way. This qualitative difference is recalled in many EU documents. According to the Laeken Declaration, ‘Europe needs to shoulder its responsibilities in the governance of globalisation. The role it has to play is that of a power resolutely doing battle against all violence, all terror and all fanaticism, but which also does not turn a blind eye to the world’s heartrending injustices. In short, a power wanting to change the course of world affairs […]’ (European Council 2001). Analogously, the text of the approved (yet not in force) Constitution proclaims:

1. The Union’s aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples. […]
4. In its relations with the wider world, the Union shall uphold and promote its values and interests. It shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child, as well as to the strict observance and the development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter. (European Union 2005: article I-3)

One of the elements which is underlined the most in the representation and active policy of the EU/Europe is the attempt to protect some core pillars of the post-war order: constitutionalism and multilateralism in the first place. The reason for such a strenuous defence is not only ideal, but responds to the concerns of a polity whose political identity is in the making. As we have seen, multilateralism has become a ‘normal practice’ in the EU. Analogously, the idea that ‘joint principles and commitment should be anchored in binding institutional mechanisms’ (constitutionalism) is another feature characterizing the European integration process and the EU as such. Furthermore, both have become core values in EU foreign policy, characterizing the EU’s international role. A breach of the solemnly proclaimed EU values and principles (including multilateralism and ‘constitutionalism’), especially if made by EU/European actors, is a threat to the EU’s credibility internally and internationally and, therefore, to the chances of the EU/Europe to
become as a full-fledged political actor.\footnote{This does not imply that violations do not occur, but that they are more costly than for a traditional state not involved in such a dense normative area as the EU/Europe.} The US’s breach of such values/pillars of world order was perceived by the EU/Europe as a real threat to its own international role, fragile because still in the making. More on the European identity can be gained though a comparison with the US.

\textit{The US}

The end of the Cold War initially did not seem to pose much of a challenge to American political identity. Debate concentrated on the polarity of the system and its implications, not on ‘what are we’? The American debate on the future of institutions was very much shaped by a pragmatic concern (\textit{What is NATO for? What are the new threats?}) and the success in the US of Fukuyama’s end of history thesis, Huntington’s clash of civilization thesis, Doyle’s re-launched democratic peace thesis and neoliberal institutionalist thesis points to an intellectual world that assumes the (at least temporary) victory of a set of values – Western, democratic. The end of the bipolar confrontation opened a sort of strategic and programmatic holiday on the US side, and a form of ‘soft isolationism’ among the American public (Nye 2002: 134), both based on the illusion that the New World Order of the post-bipolar era could last and reserve a central position for the US. Clearly, this does not mean that the end of bipolarism did not represent a challenge to the US, but I believe it represented a challenge which did not imply a serious threat to the core of American political identity.

The wars in Bosnia and Kosovo were too far away and limited to provoke in the US an internal debate similar to the one generated in Europe. Intervention in Kosovo followed a pragmatic track and led to a breach in the legalistic interpretation of world order prevalent in the early 1990s. The aim was to stop Milosevic using NATO, despite the lack of UN authorization (never officially requested). Madeleine Albright’s memoirs show that the only US concern for the want of UN authorization was limited to the implication it had on the Europeans’ attitude (Albright, 2003: 406-7). Given this US preference for a military operation through NATO, with little concern for the lack of UN authorization, Kosovo was a case of what Richard Haass later called ‘\textit{à la carte} multilateralism’ (Nye 2002: 159).

However, the greatest watershed in the US’s reinterpretation of world order and its role therein was triggered by the terrorist attacks of 9/11. In February 2002 the Institute for American Values, a small New York think tank, published ‘What We’re Fighting For: A Letter From America’, signed by 60 intellectuals amongst whom famous names such as Francis Fukuyama, Samuel Huntington, Robert Putnam, Amitai Etzioni and Michael Walzer. The letter provoked a series of resèonses.\footnote{The correspondence is available on the web site: \texttt{<http://www.americanvalues.org/html/follow-up.html>}} The
‘Letter From America’ aimed at answering the widely diffused question ‘Why do they hate us?’ and to justify the US’s war against Afghanistan on the basis of the Just War theory. In the letter we find an attempt to define the US’s values as the basis of the US’s identity and source of political behaviour (although recognizing that the US policy and citizens’ behaviour can be rightly accused of frequent inconsistency with the US’s values). The four values mentioned in the letter coincide with those that at the beginning appear as ‘fundamental truths that pertain to all people without distinction’:

‘The first is the conviction that all persons possess innate human dignity as a birthright […]. The founders of the United States, drawing upon the natural law tradition as well as upon the fundamental religious claim that all persons are created in the image of God, affirmed as “self-evident” the idea that all persons possess equal dignity. […]

Second […] is the conviction that universal moral truths (what our nation's founders called “laws of Nature and of Nature's God”) exist and are accessible to all people. […]

The third is the conviction that, because our individual and collective access to truth is imperfect, most disagreements about values call for civility, openness to other views, and reasonable argument in pursuit of truth.

The fourth is freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. […]’

‘The fifth is sharing the truth that killing in the name of God is contrary to faith in God and is the greatest betrayal of the universality of religious faith.’ (Institute for American Values 2002)

What is interesting in this representation of American core values? In the first place the idea of a universality of American values; second, the equally continuous search for the philosophical and historical origin of each specific value, frequently – in the text - found in the US’s founding fathers; third, the restless reference to God & faith; fourth a positivistic reference to ‘truth’, as something objective. I will touch on the first three, considering the latter a consequence of the third.

The idea of a universality of American values is shared by both conservatives/nationalists and liberal thinkers. Henry Nau has recently regarded positive the fact that American values and basic elements of its national identity have gone global as this will allow the US to feel ‘at home abroad’ (Nau 2002). Such an idea of universal values in the US case is coupled with the idea of being a ‘chosen nation’ with a ‘manifest destiny’ to expand itself in the territory assigned by providence to the free development of liberty. In this context, the assumption of a universality of American values translates into a duty to spread and support such values worldhile. Anders Stephanson has studies the historical paradox of a nationalism which attributes to itself not just a prophetic but also a universal role (Stephanson 1995). In Stephanson’s convincing reconstruction the logic of a manifest destiny guided the US’s response to 9/11 as it had guided its foreign policy during the Cold War. With the ‘war on terrorism’ the US have reaffirmed the universality of their values (Stephanson 2004: 171). The solution of the US’s ‘search for a new enemy’ (Campbell 1992), was

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6 This is John O’Sullivan’s understanding of the expression ‘manifest destiny’ which he coined in 1845. See Stephanson 1995.
easily found in the enemies of American liberal values. The partial (though significant) deconstruction of the pillars of Cold War World order was by no means perceived as a threat to the American identity which was never constituted by such pillars, but considered them as useful instruments. This allowed the US to respond to the challenge of the end of bipolarism by globalizing its Cold War aims and affirming itself as a “Liberal Empire” (Bishai 2004), which is a contradiction in terms for many Europeans.

As we have seen, the basis of American values is usually recognized as the American Creed, either alone, as a result of the need to define shared values in a multicultural society resulting from immigration (Michael Walzer), or as the product of the distinctly Anglo-Protestant culture of America’s initial settlers (Samuel Huntington). Although the interpretation of the Creed has not been identical through time, from the initial formulation by Thomas Jefferson, to the official formalization in William Tyler Page’s ‘The American’s Creed’ (1917, approved by the House of Representatives in 1918), its core principles have not changed much. Freedom, democracy and human rights are usually said to be intrinsically linked to the American Creed and to represent values that the Americans share with the Europeans. Are those values and principles so different from those we consider constitutive of European political identity? In truth, the difference is not so great. In Europe individualism and liberty assume meaning in a largely more communitarian perspective with respect to the US, and laissez-faire can by no means be included among the core values defining European political identity, while solidarity is treated as a political value of the group rather than a moral imperative for individuals. However, three things are significantly different in the two sets of values: the interpretation of so-called self-expression values, the role of religious values and the role attributed to multilateralism and ‘constitutionalism’ in the political identity of, in turn, the Americans and the Europeans. Let me touch on each of them separately.

Despite the American assumption on the universality of US’s values, what frequently differs between Europe and the US are not actual political values, but how they are specifically interpreted in the sense of meaning, relationship among values and their translation into a specific principle. A couple of examples will illustrate this point. Particularly interesting are the different interpretations given on the two sides of the Atlantic to the value of liberty in the context of the freedom of speech: while in the US blasphemy and racist speech are treated in the same manner (there is a right to both on the basis of a right to free speech), in the EU blasphemy is legal because it is an attack on ideas, while racist speech is illegal because it is considered an attack against a person (Haarscher, 2001; Cf. also Lucarelli 2006). Another interesting example is offered by the US’s constitutional right to carry a weapon for personal self-defence, a right which is not explicitly recognized as fundamental in European constitutions or in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. It is apparent that two
different conceptions of the role of the State in safeguarding individual’s security are at work here. Another way to look at different interpretations of the same political value is offered by the WVS which shows that on average Americans and Europeans share similar political values and score highly on ‘self-expression values’ (mostly relative to political and economic freedoms), while differ remarkably as far as ‘traditional values’ are concerned. As a matter of fact, on a traditional-secular values axis, Americans turn out to be far more traditional (i.e. religious, patriotic, against abortion, euthanasia, divorce and suicide) than any European country except Ireland.\footnote{\url{http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/library/}. See also: See also: Inglehart, Basanez, Diez-Medrano, Halman, Luijkx 2004.} Furthermore, the distance between Americans and Europeans on the tradition/secular axis is shown to be growing.

Neither Americans nor Europeans are monolithic groups (rather both have secular/traditionalist portions of the population and there is much distance also between, say, Italy and Sweden on the one hand, and Colorado and New York State on the other), however, on average, Europeans are more secular and have moved more in that direction throughout the years, while Americans are more traditional and have become even more so. A significant component of traditional values is represented by religious values. Here the US and Europe diverge quite remarkably, not only due to the degree of religiosity of the American society but also because of the degree of civic religion present in American public life (for this reason, the ‘Letter From America’’s frequent reference to the founding fathers, God, faith and truth cannot be simply regarded as the expression of a conservative view, but a significant expression of a trait of the American identity). Though the separation of Church and State may be a reality in both Europe and the US, the degree of legitimacy of public reference to God and faith in the US is much higher. In no European country does one see reference to God to such a degree as in the US, where citizens recite a Pledge of Allegiance to ‘one nation, under God,’ and inscribed on the dollar is ‘In God We Trust’. No neo-elected European leader would publicly proclaim that ‘man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and earth’, as G.W. Bush did at his second inauguration speech in January 2005 (Bush 2005). Furthermore, surveys highlight that while Europeans take the secular view that it is possible to be moral without believing in God (70% in Italy, 86% in France, 73% in Great Britain), Americans, as people most developing countries, believe that personal morality is linked to belief in God (58%) (Pew 2003).

As values assume meaning within the ideational context of which they are part, the fact that the similar political values of liberty and democracy are embedded in Europe and the US in two different sets of traditional/secular values partly explains the sometimes different interpretations (in terms of meaning, priorities, translation into political praxis). For instance, the profoundly religious
character of American identity has produced both a profound sense of individual liberty whose more elegant expression is the ‘human dignity’ recalled by the 60 intellectuals in ‘A Letter from America’, but also a sense of justice which does not exclude the possibility of the death penalty as extreme punishment for an offence. Something which is radically excluded in Europe, precisely on the basis of the principle of human dignity (European Union 2000 art. 2.1). This difference, as known, has already produced problems in foreign policy, particularly with regard to the possibility to use the death penalty in the so-called ‘War on Terrorism’, but also as far as a justification of war in the case of Afghanistan and Iraq is concerned. If the trend towards a growing distance between Europe and the US on the traditional/secular values axis continues, then we will inevitably also see a growing distance in the interpretation of other shared values.

Furthermore, 9/11 seems to have enlarged the transatlantic distance also on the other value axis (survival/self-expression values), having led the US President to state explicitly that US security comes prior to liberty – a position which Bush skilfully abandoned in his second inauguration speech, where the word ‘freedom’ appears 26 times and ‘liberty’ 15! Finally, though the picture of Americans’ values may be well captured by the WVS, the distance between the people’s and elites’ interpretation of American identity, which Samuel Huntington (2004) criticized, has been largely reduced by the Bush Administration, which has openly espoused traditional values. This has deprived transatlantic relations of a fundamental element of cohesion: cosmopolitan elites.

However, divergent interpretations of similar values on the two sides of the Atlantic and a certain tendency towards more traditional values in the US with comparison to Europe would not have been considered all that relevant (and in fact were not, for a long time) had the critical juncture of the 1990s and 2000s not shown a further ideational difference: the fact that multilateralism and constitutionalism had become fundamental pillars in the political identity of the Europeans, while they had not become part of the political identity of the Americans. Rarely in the analyses of American political identity, nor in more contemporary reinterpretations of The Creed, do we find reference to these as constitutive elements of American identity. A liberal such as Joseph Nye (2002) does not rule out the possibility of unilateral action and provides a checklist for the adoption of multilateral versus unilateral tactics. Even if one looks at one of the most multilateral administrations, that of Bill Clinton, one finds that multilateralism is understood as a policy tool (cf. Jørgensen 2004; Cox 2003). As for public opinion, surveys show that since 9/11 a large majority of Americans have placed overarching priority on security and support Bush’s new Grand Strategy as delineated in the 2002 National Security Strategy, even when this implies pre-emptive war. In May 2003, after the president declared the end of major combat military operations, support for pre-emptive war peaked at 67% (79% Republicans, 58% Democrats, 6% independent), and in July 2004
was still at 60% (88% Republicans, 44% Democrats, 54% independent) (Pew 2004 : 26). I believe that this has not only to do with the priority of security after 9/11, but also with the fact that although multilateralism and constitutionalism were a product of American values, they have not become an integral part of them.

Concluding remarks

From this analysis several conclusions can be drawn.

From a theoretical perspective, it emerges that IR literature needs to fully reintegrate attention to the interaction between domestic and international dynamics combining its attention to normative/ideational factors with attention to shifts in the material structure of world politics. Ideational and material factors are definitely not mutually exclusive. It further needs to avoid the current reference to political identity as if it was an attribute of a state, which is misleading, rather try to better investigate the relationship between the political identity of its domestic constituencies and both (a) the foreign policy of the state/polity, and (ii) the external image of the state/polity. Finally, IR fails to pay enough attention to the relationship between legitimacy and identity. To be honest, the literature on ‘norms’ makes such a link but it could be done in a more explicit way.

As far as the case-study is concerned, it was but an attempt to show how identity and legitimacy concerns and identity are connected and how such a connection changes according to the specific content (type of values, specific interpretation of values) and the specific degree of consolidation of a group’s political identity. In particular, it showed that an interesting relationship exists between processes of identity formation and the response to ideational shocks in complex communities with different degrees of maturity. In the case of the EU, dismissing the pillars of world order would have meant dismissing fundamental pillars of a European political identity still largely under construction. The US Administration, on the contrary, did not regard a pragmatic transformation in the world order, and even a breach of some of its principles, as a threat to the American political identity.

Furthermore, the analysis recalled that political identity is not a monolithic entity within a socio-political group, either in the sense of being interpreted in precisely the same way by the social body, or for implying a perfect correspondence between the political elites’ and the social groups’ understandings. Still it is possible to point to some basic traits of a political identity which are shared by the members of the group as the ones that most constitute the core of the ‘we feeling’: basic traits whose interpretation is always subject to renegotiation within the group, particularly when previous interpretations have been challenged by external events or the government’s policy. Finally, the paper has shown that a debate shaped around the question ‘do Europe and the US share
the same values?’ is misplaced. They clearly share fundamental political values, but this does not tell us much about their differences which rest on the differing interpretations of those values in the socio-political context in which they operate.

**References**


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