

Unpacking the European Sentiment

ECF WEBINAR 16 March 2021 REPORT

The European Cultural Foundation (ECF) was founded in 1954 with the vision to build Europe through culture and education as a solid base for a European sentiment to unfold. To quote our founding father Robert Schuman “Europe needs to recover economically and socially, to organise itself politically, to strengthen its security and project itself culturally. However, all our efforts will be vain if Europe is not animated by a European sentiment.”

The original idea of cultivating a European sentiment among European citizens was born in a particular historical and intellectual context of post-war Europe. It emerged in political and cultural circles driven by the vision of a united, peaceful and federal Europe. Today, 67 years later, where are we in the forging of a European sentiment? Did we succeed in nourishing a sense of European purpose and belonging among European citizens? How has the term and its expressions evolved over time? What are the obstacles and narratives that affect the deployment of a European sentiment? How

can we track its evolution in the years to come? These were some of the questions we put to an inspiring group of thinkers, writers, journalists, academics and students gathered in a webinar on 16 March 2021.

The text below captures the essence of a dense, rich and very insightful first conversation that we want to continue beyond the meeting, in various forms and in different formats. The text includes drawings by visual storyteller Menah Marleen Wellen. We thank all the participants for their contributions and generosity of spirit.



Welcome by Andre Wilkens – Director, European Cultural Foundation

Two years ago, when I started at the European Cultural Foundation, it was also the run up to the organisation's 65th anniversary. We had an archive project going on then, and I dipped into the archive, and I thought, "Jesus, this will be boring!", but it was actually fascinating. One of the things I found the most interesting was the original statutes from 1954, signed by Robert Schuman, who was the first Chairman of the Board of the European Cultural Foundation. If you read that document today, it sounds almost revolutionary in the way it describes the situation in the 1950s in Europe: the nationalism, the need for solidarity in Europe – as such, it is a very contemporary document.

I was struck by the mission that Robert Schuman, Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, Denis de Rougemont and others gave to the European Cultural Foundation. It was created to promote a European sentiment, the development and preservation of a feeling of mutual comprehension and democratic solidarity between the peoples of Europe, by encouraging cultural and educational activities of common interest. In a pursuit of this mission, with the European Commission, we co-developed and ran the first Erasmus programme in the 1980s – one of



Andre Wilkens

the initiatives in Europe that one could say had the most impact in promoting a kind of a European sentiment.

We have worked in Eastern Europe and the EU Neighbourhood on people-to-people exchanges, as well as on numerous other programmes and initiatives, but so far we haven't taken stock of how far we have actually come with the European sentiment? How has it evolved?

That would be a mega evaluation of what we have done, and of course, we are only a small player in what happened in the history of Europe since the Second World War.

What is the European sentiment? In Europe now we are looking at growth rates, at currencies, at strategies for how could we manage the pandemic, but are we actually looking properly at the feeling of belonging? Have we been looking at what kind of solidarity there is? How important it can be and will be, when we are dealing with things like the pandemic? We think it is time to look at this properly and to develop something tangible, to support initiatives in this direction. This meeting is the first step in this direction.

65 years promoting a European sentiment

Isabelle Schwarz, Head of Public Policy, European Cultural Foundation (moderator)

Images of shared history, moments of shared European experience, such as the Second World War, the 1968 protests or the fall of the Berlin Wall. Today, Covid-19 has pulled us together globally against a common enemy. But will the pandemic have contributed to shaping a European sentiment, a sense of shared responsibility and lasting solidarity? Will we emerge stronger or weaker as a community of interests but also a community of purpose? The vaccination campaign could become the EU's litmus test, and have a lasting influence on Europeans' perception of and feeling about Europe.



Isabelle Schwarz

Part 1: What is the European Sentiment?

“In Our Sentiment We Trust” – opening presentation by Guido Snel, Lecturer in Modern European Literature, University of Amsterdam (ACES)

I am afraid that it is going to be more of a writer's than an academic approach; it turned out to be a very personal take on the European sentiment. Let me start with very recent events. At the University of Amsterdam, we have known Frank Vanderbroucke as a hard-working, brilliant and extremely diligent scholar, devoted to the study of social Europe. In our Amsterdam Centre for European Studies (ACES), when the pandemic began, he left our university to become the newly appointed Minister of Health in Belgium in October 2021. During his first public visits to a hospital for Covid-19 patients in Liege, he spoke of his personal impressions in front of the cameras – caught on the spot, as it were. In his eyes, there were tears.

It was an intermittent face in the European response to the pandemic. The initial phase, in which the virus was merely an unknown external threat, had passed. The virus was now being politicised, framed and contested, contained or not by policies and statistics. Harsh words were exchanged between the European North and South. And here was this new minister, a familiar face in earlier decades, invited back to the scene because of his reputation as a super manager. With tears in his eyes. The image struck me and, for a moment, I was moved – the numbness caused by media coverage



Guido Snel

suspended for a moment. I thought, “No” and I sensed, “Yes, this is a catastrophe, it is horrible” and it concerns all of us, **we need to get our force and act together as Europe.**

The same night, Vanderbroucke was interviewed on prime time TV, and the sentiment was gone. It was now all self-containment, self-confidence and self-management. This is what you expect from a minister in the midst of a pandemic. And yet, something was gone – was it the momentum, a moment of authenticity?

Historical dictionaries first mentioned **sentiment** in the 14th century in the English language, that is: referring to “personal experience of one's own feeling through friendship”. Through French it goes back to Medieval Latin – **sentimentum** “sentimental feeling, affection, opinion”.

The root is Latin – **sentire** – the first meaning of which is not to feel in an emotional sense, but to observe, through one of the senses. It reoccurs in English in the 17th century with the meaning of what one feels about something. It gains centrality in the 18th century, in the widest sense, as a thought coloured by and proceeded from emotion.

Earlier on **sense**, going back to Latin **census**, connoted perception, feeling, undertaking. Here is a very intriguing metaphorical move, where a **sense** starts to also mean to find one's way, or to go mentally. A similar shared meaning is to be found in old High German **cinan** – to go, travel, strive after, perceive. Modern German – **sin**, sense or meaning, as in the meaning of life for instance.

With the rise of rationalism in the mid-18th century and Kant's Categorical Imperative as a seemingly solid base for morality, there simultaneously arose the notion, perhaps contrary to the faith in rationality, that emotions and feelings are an equal, if not more powerful, basis for morality for moral judgements. Mid-eighteenth-century travellers, such as Laurence Stearn's Mr. Yorick¹ on his sentimental journey through Italy and France are continuously swept by emotions and feelings. And they take them very seriously. So is the Serbian former monk, and enlightenment philosopher Dositej Obradović, when he revisits, for instance, his region of birth in northern Serbia, near Novi Sad in the early 1760s. He falls on his knees and sheds tears fertilising the soil with emotions. Mind you, all this takes place before the rise of modern national identity, or perhaps one should say *the national sentiment*.

When Immanuel Kant elaborates his notion of world citizenship, he is thinking of the duty of every nation to extend hospitality to people in need, from all over the world. He does so in an essay called "Towards perpetual peace" in 1795. His European political landscape is post-Westphalian but pre-national. It is also pre-democratic, still ruled by emperors and monarchs. His argument is analytic and dispassionate.²

In the course of the 19th century, the national sentiments became predominant. There were other powerful political sentiments too, such as that of international workers' solidarity, and even a European one, such as Victor Hugo's passionate plea for a United States of Europe. However, the national sentiment prevailed, leading to two world wars in the 20th century, whereas the internationalist workers' sentiment was lost in the socialist and communist experiments. So, we were left with the European post-Second World War project that was very much driven by a negative impulse, perhaps even wary of sentiment, afraid of it – "Never again!", "No more war!", "No more nationalism!". Economic prosperity and the social welfare state helped to de-politicise our thinking of United Europe.

I was born in 1972, a child of European integration, but equally, if not more so of a persistent national identity. There was a very modest European sentiment in my childhood – BeNeLux free border passage, Eurovision multinational singing contest, including Israel, but excluding Eastern Europe or East Central Europe. Sport competitions, where sentiments were either based on city allegiance, or national sentiment, or geopolitical Cold War. When, during the Olympic Winter Games in Sarajevo in 1984, the Dutch favourite in speed skating made a fool of himself, we – together with the reporters – shifted our sentiment to the Swedish contender. Never, ever would we support one of these doping frauds from the Eastern Bloc. Tour de France with strong Dutch competitors, the national sentiment, but no international friendship.

Let me make the story even more personal. To be very honest, most if not all of the major decisions that I have made in my life, both as a scholar and as a private person, were far from rational. They were, to speak in the discourse of the 18th century sentimental, intuitive – written with emotions. They arose from happiness bliss, but also from outrage and grief. Why I became a student and translator of South Slavic literatures was for the powerful reason that Amsterdam was thoroughly changed by the influx of Yugoslav refugees in the early 1990s, but also because, as a reader, I was defenceless, faced with the aesthetic and moral appeal of literary fiction from the former Yugoslavia. The combination was simply irresistible and when I learned the language, my infatuation was already an accomplished fact. It was there to stay.

The same sentiment certainly informed what was arguably the most important decision in my life, to not join the Dutch United Nation forces as an interpreter to the United Nations enclave of Srebrenica by the end of 1994. There was some rationality in this decision, but it mostly had to do with sentiment, with aversion and misunderstandings between me and the Dutch army. I loathed the uniforms, the Dutch flag both the national ideology, as well as the United Nations directives. I felt instinctively that my allegiance would be with the Bosnian people but it became quite clear to me that, for the type of translator that the army wanted no such partisanship would be allowed. Incidentally, the year in which the Srebrenica massacre took place – the first genocide on the European continent since 1945 – also saw the 200th anniversary of Immanuel Kant's essays on perpetual peace. Ever since I have lived my life as a literary translator, a writer, and as an academic.

¹ Laurence Stern, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, by Mr Yorick, (1768)

² Immanue Kant, *Towards perpetual Peace*, (1795)

Today, much is being said about the ideological position of scholars in the humanities and the social sciences. There is no objectivity, and at best, there is interest subjectivity. Does this mean that our research should openly advocate political views? What do we do with our sentiments? What is academic sovereignty?

It is certainly no coincidence that much of my academic work is a critique and a deconstruction of the political and cultural damage done by the national sentiment.

Let's be honest, the force of sentiment nowadays is again with the populists – with Orban and Babis, and Vucic in Central Europe, and Wilders, Farage and Le Pen in Western Europe. As academics we cannot lower our analytic standards. The lies and distortions, which fuel the national sentiment, need our constant attention. **This is perhaps a relevant question then: do our sentiments merely make us bystanders in the judgements in our lives, and the decisions and acts they lead to? Or can we think of the sentiment as a valuable companion to our rational European lives?**

Monica Sassatelli, cultural sociologist, University of Bologna and Goldsmiths, University of London

Your PhD research involved a case study of the European Capital of Culture as a means of identity building. What is the key finding of your research in relation to culture as a means to foster a distinct European identity?

Culture can be about emotions, but not all – culture is a very complex concept. The findings from my research on European cultural identity, I think, has a lot to do with a consciousness and a willingness to integrate diversity. Not that everyone would accept that but this idea of “unity in diversity”, even if it is an official motto, we tend to regard it with suspicion – at least, I do. But it does make sense, in the sense that common European identity based on culture only works if it is about a family resemblance. A family of cultures that share some things that others do not, but find an interest and a willingness to continue working together and also build solidarity on that.

European identity development is a complex process, and that is both the strength and the weakness of European identity. Especially now with populism that has been evoked, where strong and simple identities are

When the invitation to think about the European sentiment reached me, I responded carefully, a bit wary even. Intuitively, I tend to take sides with Immanuel Kant and trust analysis above the exchange of arguments. And because, intuitively again, **I have never felt at ease with grand sentiments.** Even the European ones. However, listening to myself – to what came up in the course of this short essay – I also have to admit that my life has run parallel with that of the European continent, and that we **share if not a passion for Europe, several European passions.**

Transfer would be one way to sum this up. A passion for travelling movement in space, and also through historical time. **To be exposed to different ways and manners, to get lost and still feel somehow not entirely out of place.** A passion for translation, for cross-border understanding and misunderstanding. You thought you were speaking the same language, but you realise you were not, and yet you find common ground for your misunderstanding. Thank you!

very appealing, there's lots of nostalgia for that. That's why this idea of focusing on the European sentiment is both something that I'm really interested in, but also worries me a bit. Even the shift that we have made from identity to sentiment – it seems already that there is a shift. Sentiment seems like a further trajectory in the language around Europe. First political identity, then narratives of Europe, now the European sentiment – it all seems to be playing on what Europe feels to be lacking.

I do not think Europe will ever win that battle, that comparison with the national. It is a losing battle. **It is Europe, the European culture, the European sentiment.**



Monica Sassatelli

Rosi Braidotti (who is quoted in the agenda) says something I agree with (paraphrasing): “Europe promotes plural and diverse identity in a world that keep rewarding the opposite, rewarding purity and simplicity”. I think that is what European culture tells us, and I am not quite sure how it works with sentiment. **Because sentiments tend to simplify, as we have seen with its etymology,**

they are about the moment. I am interested in the trajectory. I wonder whether there is a trajectory in the official discourse that we now want to concentrate on the sentiment? Because, we have seen that the

European identity seems to be lacking – both at official level, as well in the wider society. So I think is an interesting question, but there are elements of worry in this use of sentiment, at least for me.

Nathalie Nougareyde, journalist, columnist and former editor of The Guardian’s “Europe Now” series

What are your thoughts on the role of media in creating communities and shaping our imaginary?

With my journalistic hat, I want to share two personal things. When I was a teenager I lived in Alsace. This was the early 1980s, and the notion of the European project was quasi-sacred. In high school, I was studying a bit of German at the time, Franco-German reconciliation was considered and taught as something very sacred. When I went to study political science, history and law, I chose the European section, and I studied European law (Droit communautaire). When the Berlin Wall fell, I was still in the middle of my studies. I wanted to become a journalist. For me it was obvious that the area that I would absolutely devote myself to as a journalist would be Europe, in the sense of **wider Europe, Europe that was opening up, with borders opening, with the democratic transformations in the East.** This for me was an eye-opening moment, like for many people of my generation.

Media organisations have not thought of themselves as vehicles towards embracing a wider human space. We have a media landscape in Europe, which is an inheritance of the 20th century, and sometimes even the 19th century. **I think we need to embrace 21st**



Nathalie
Nougareyde

century approaches in the media narrative. It is happening, and I am talking in a European frame of mind, but it is going to take more time. One reason for this is that we are in the middle of an absolutely traumatic moment. It is impossible to talk about, or to discuss European sentiment without looking at what we are experiencing right now – over 856,000 deaths caused by Covid-19 across the European continent (including Russia). Looking at the casualties of Covid across the world, Europe is the continent that had some of the highest rates. These things matter – this trauma of so many deaths in such a short time will negatively affect the European sentiment or identity. People are scared and shrinking mentally into their national silos.

Looking at the situation with vaccines, and comparing each other across nation states, it is like we are in some kind of race – a kind of **vaccine nationalism.** The mass loss of lives needs to **make us rethink the notion of European sentiments.** It is worth reading Toni Judt’s book “Europe: The Grand Illusion”, and seeing Timothy Snyder’s view on the question of the nation and EU.

¹ Toni Judt, ‘Europe: The grand illusion’, (1996)

² Timothy Snyder, ‘A speech to Europe, (2019), see video [here](#).

Ismail Einashe, journalist and writer, UK

I think of this in terms of European sentiment as a feeling and identity, but also it is about belonging. I **am thinking about this in terms of the perspective of those who are excluded. Those labelled as non-European,** those on the margins, those on the periphery of Europe, who rarely get a look in from the centre, and are usually rendered invisible in the mainstream. I look at this from a journalistic perspective, as part of this cross-border collaborative journalism project “Lost in Europe”, which is made up of twenty journalists, working across European countries, looking at the disappearance of child

migrants and broadly within the migration space. This is also analysed in terms of localisation perspective of the country like the UK, which has just left the European Union, and which is on a different trajectory, away from this idea of European sentiment.

I am also thinking about this in terms of **who is a European?** Those on the margins have the clearest view on what is really going on but usually they are the ones who are not consulted, not engaged with. In my work as a reporter across Europe, covering specifically migration, and having edited a collection of essays for

the book *Lost in Media* for the European Cultural Foundation, one of the key things that we wanted during that collection was trying to think about **how we take migrants' perspectives and insert them into the public sphere, and put them at the heart of the public sphere.**³

An idea of Europe itself I think is problematic. We need to pilot all sorts of other concepts of Europe, because, when we talk about Europe, we talk about the European Union institutions. It isn't about Europe across the Mediterranean, Turkey, Russia, and so on. It is Europe that doesn't include its historical collections.

I'm joining today from Nairobi, Kenya. I think the histories of Europe, of colonialism and violence and racism are embedded in what a European sentiment has been and has become, and we need to talk about



Ismail Einashe

that. The darker sentiments that are happening in Europe, particularly in terms of the nationalistic far-right sentiments, are growing. Thinking about how to oppose that and one thing that somebody else already mentioned, is the word **diversity**, which has become a kind of a loaded term in many ways.

The trouble is that a lot of these initiatives in Europe are committed to ideas of diversity and inclusivity that claim to be bringing people from the margins into the centre. But these are usually gimmicks. We've got to be mindful about asking **who's in this room** at the moment in the Zoom. Thinking about what is to come after this event, what is it that ECF would support, thinking about **how we really put diversity, inclusiveness and collaboration at the very heart of the process.**

³ *Lost in Media, Migrant Perspectives and the Public Sphere*, 2019, co-edited by Ismail Einashe and Thomas Roueché, Valiz, Amsterdam.

Giuliano da Empoli, writer and journalist, political advisor, former Mayor of Culture in Florence, founder and CEO of Volta, a Milan-based think tank

*In a collective tribune published last week in Le Monde and other European newspapers, you call for a European New Deal for Culture – in the spirit of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal that comprised not only economic and social measures but also a huge **cultural storytelling** programme. What should be the key ingredients of such a European New Deal, and how would it be able to transcend deeply entrenched divisions among communities?*

It is usually a conversation like this, which back in the past would take place in a villa on Lake Como or a place like that. It would be some kind of a beautiful intellectual conversation about European sentiment and European identity and what it is. We can have different perspectives and you will have a writer and you will have a few academics from different fields. That is fantastic and it has been happening for decades, but it was never very important for the way the European construction actually developed.

The European construction was conceived and designed at the beginning, to be somehow independent of cultural debates, independent or isolated from identity questions. The EU construction followed a completely different logic: functionalism, technocratic and economic integration etc. That was a wise way of the founders of Europe who had the vision of European culture. They established

the fantastic European Cultural Foundation, they took a few initiatives, but wisely kept these at the margins, because **serious people who deal with Europe, don't deal with culture.**

However nowadays, **this has completely shifted!** At this point, as the technocratic construction [of the EU] has reached its limits, and the next stage is openly a political one, and especially with this reawakening



Giuliano da Empoli

of nationalist movements and ideas all over Europe, this is becoming ever clearer. **Now this debate about European culture and a European sentiment has become a central feature for the future of Europe.** If we do not deal with this, if we don't have this conversation now, we won't be able to either make Europe progress and overcome the crisis, or even to stop it from disintegrating. That is why I think it is very important.

Roosevelt's New Deal was central in his understanding of how to overcome the 1930's crisis in America. What he understood was that you could not have a Policy New Deal without a Cultural New Deal (an identity and cultural New Deal). That was done with Federal Project Number One and the Writers' Project, and all kind of other initiatives that were taken back in the day. Today Europe is facing a Hamiltonian moment. We know that there are new policies and the recovery plan, and the Green Deal, and policies to face the pandemic, and all that. If we take a look at this transformation from the policy point of view, it looks like they are searching for the **magic PowerPoint slide that will introduce all**

that. I think that we are sadly mistaken, because it will not be enough to deal with all the things and feelings that Natalie was mentioning in her intervention.

On the other hand, my vision of European sentiment and identity will be different from the one envisaged by each one of you. And that's okay because **disagreement produces energy; controversy on European identity and European sentiment produces energy, and we have to accept this controversy and face it. Instead of just keeping culture out of the conversation,** because we are afraid that we are going to disagree on something that it is going to be too delicate to mention again.

That is something they did in the Writers' Project (in Roosevelt's New Deal). They dealt with all kinds of very controversial issues. The first narratives on slavery, on forced migration into the US, on social issues, all paid with federal money by the American administration. I really think that we should not be afraid of doing something similar.

James Kennedy, Professor of Modern Dutch History, University College Utrecht



James Kennedy

In June 2020, an updated version of the so-called Canon of the Netherlands was released. It consists of 50 "windows" that summarise important historical themes, and is meant to serve as an inspiration for Dutch history education. The updated version pays attention to more diverse historical icons. Could you imagine that there is room for a "European canon"? And in which way could this not only be an educational tool, but something also really inspirational in the broader sense for nurturing the debate about the European sentiment, or desire of belonging or the common European space?

The whole idea about a canon is that there is this norm or measure established, and it has a particular visibility and authority in Dutch education. Precisely for that reason, it is immediately controversial and there are all kinds of reasons why you wouldn't want to have that happen. You may disagree with what is in that canon. I think canonicity is valuable not because it sets down in stone whatever people have to live upon in a particular nation or society, but because of the fact that it elicits debate. Canons have a value as they shift with the conversation. Canons are one way, as it has been in the Netherlands, to talk about what is important about Dutch history, **what is important about the European past, not just the positive sides but also the shadow sides, or the ambiguity of the European past.** These are all things that can be discussed and should be discussed, and having a canon is one way of putting it, or a way to discuss about what Europe is, or ought to be in a cultural sense.

Rimma Samir, Master's student in political science, Paris School of International Affairs

You studied political science in Paris, did an internship on media activism at the European Cultural Foundation in Amsterdam, and are now back for some time in your home country Kazakhstan. You mentioned once, "Europe is not perfect but still less crazy than other places!" We all may have experienced this sentiment at some point, under wildly diverging circumstances. It is essential to have such outside-in perspective. What do you make of this concept or feeling of a European sentiment?



I would speak from my own personal experience, based on my observation and interactions with young Europeans, because that is mostly the interactions that I have had over my study years in Europe. I have lived in Netherlands for three years and in Paris for two years but because of Covid, I had to go back to Kazakhstan. My perspective is of an outsider looking in and living inside of Europe. Before coming to Europe, I thought that the feeling of European identity among European citizens was much stronger, because that's the image I was growing up with as a person of my generation.

I realised very fast that there is an obvious divide, based on privileges of education and privileges of moving around. Because the people who I know are the students, who have had the privilege of studying at good universities, and then have had the privilege of doing Erasmus programmes around Europe, or of traveling outside of Europe. In that sense, they were able to build this identity through these lived experiences.

I feel there is another part of Europe, of people who maybe do not have that privilege available to them. It is important, with building this general European sentiment, to include these people. To look out and see who is in the room and give the people who maybe are marginalised more of a voice in what is being decided on what the image of a European citizen is.

As I said, the world is much crazier elsewhere and if you ask any other person who is thinking of migrating to somewhere "Where would you want to go?", I think a lot of people would still say "Europe", because there is still that image of stability, of adherence to human rights, of general shared humanity. I think that is something that the European project has been successful in: telling the outside world. It has maybe not necessarily been successful in convincing its own citizens, or at least the marginalised parts of the citizenry.

Part 2: Looking ahead – How to track a European sentiment in the future?

In the second part of our seminar, we looked at ways to capture and track the opinions of Europeans using surveys, polls, studies, and explored what would help the tracing of progress or regression of a European sentiment. Is there a sensible way to capture European sentiments in the future, and what are the factors that influence the feelings and the perceptions of citizens? What types of projects or initiatives could contribute to this exercise, and foster a critical debate about Europe?

Isabell Hoffmann, Bertelsmann Foundation, Programme Europe's Future / eupinions

For five years, you have been regularly collecting **data about the opinions of Europeans about the EU**. The data analysis shows very clear trends and developments but also provides insights into citizens' expectations and priorities for the EU. For example, **freedom to travel** is the most chosen top benefit of EU membership.

The freedom to move around is what we have sorely missed over this year of lockdown. Would the fact of delivering it back again serve as an important trigger of a European sentiment and as a significant success of the EU?

I feel the urge to reflect a bit on what has been said in the first part of the afternoon. **A sentiment is an attitude or feeling towards something or somebody, whereas identity is an attitude and feeling towards oneself.** You can have a sentiment towards somebody else or something else that is completely different from actually what you feel about yourself. So you can have a positive sentiment about the European Union – but I wouldn't know if that immediately translates towards an identity issue?

I feel that a distinction is made between the "Brussels EU" and the "identity EU". It's maybe a risk to over-romanticise one thing, and underestimate another thing. There is a barrier that looks almost unsurmountable, and I see a certain risk in splitting these things up in a very distinct way.

Besides being European "by privilege", I would also like to put forward that there are Europeans by necessity. Loads and loads of people move around because there is an economic necessity for them to move around. We hardly meet them in circles like in this webinar today but they probably outnumber the people that are actually European by privilege.

Now some more about what I do. We found *eupinions* ([link](#)) – our project, our regular survey and data collection – five years ago. It was inspired by the experience of the Euro crisis, with the aim of seeing how all of a sudden the European citizens in the European public sphere, all the things we used to talk in circles like these, that they really don't have a lot of meaning out there in the political world, but



Isabell Hoffmann

they came up on the big stage and started playing a role. Very strong statements were put out about what people wanted and mainly about what people did not want. You could see a straight line between politicians wanting to prevent something, and having hard evidence about what Europeans did not want.

When we looked at the data, and in what ways we actually have to measure, visualise and bring them to the attention of everybody, and rely on them to identify attitudes, **we realised that the data collections are very slim.** We have a large data collection available on the **eupinions** website. We have two sets of data – one is changing rapidly and the other one is a steady one. Regarding the steady one, we have a questionnaire repeated every three months.

When we think about a European sentiment, we think about how people feel towards: 1) the political system (be it national or European); and **2) the policies** put out; When we ask about the political system we ask about democracy, for instance, *How do you feel about democracy working in your country or in the European Union? Or How do you feel about the direction of either your country, or the EU?* – which would be for assessing the decision-making and where this takes you.

We also ask about attitudes towards EU membership. We ask the question of adherence. *“Do you think if you could vote for your country to be a member of the European Union, how would you decide?”* On the other hand, there is a question that is very dear to me and it concerns the social environment; you take pressure away from people by asking them to say something about themselves and to say what they claim in their social environment. What we see in a very tiny nutshell is, **when we ask people about principles and potentials of European integration politics and policy, we get very positive, high marks.** This response comes in a steady way ever since we have started the surveys. However, when we ask people about the state of affairs, how they feel right now and about their short-term projection of the future: *What do you think it will be in two years from now?*, then the answers flip and become negative.

There is a certain gap between the potential of the future on the one hand, and the assessment of the reality on the other. There is a gap between those two, probably that is normal, but in the case of the European Union politics, this gap is just too wide. We see over the past two years that it is kind of narrowing, but it is still very wide. **It is in that gap that many populist and anti-European sentiments are working their way.**

I would like to quote the “grand master” of anti-European poisoning, Mr. Farage. He used to have one key sentence that he repeated very often: “The European Union is a good idea but it just doesn’t work!” What he does here is to go to the heart of this ambivalence between potential and reality, and pull people on what I would consider the “dark side of the moon”. I think we need to work hard to turn that around and pull people towards the positive side with their sentiments, and then hopefully create a European identity.

Edgar Oganjesjan, Policy Officer, Eurobarometer

“Over many years Eurobarometers have shown that half of the Europeans felt that their voices were not heard, democracy was too weak, and the distance was too great between the people and the EU. This is reflected in a new Barometer in 2021, in which almost all citizens (92%) believe that the voices of EU citizens should be taken more into account in the EU’s decisions. This means that citizens have something to say about the EU but also feel something about Europe that could be made tangible and traceable – or is this a misinterpretation?”

I wanted to start by saying that all my comments and statements do not reflect those of the European Commission, but are solely personal.

The Eurobarometer was established in 1974 by Jacques-René Rabier, also a very dedicated European (along with Robert Schuman and other EU founders). When it comes to something like the European sentiment, or tracking people’s opinions, we need to be **very wary of over-interpreting such figures of over relying on them** because they are a very limited tool in many ways. The quantitative approach necessitates many aspects and variables but the **collection methodology cannot capture all the soft aspects** that have been discussed today. All the different sentiments going around at a given moment cannot distinguish between a political impetus of the moment. This is something that is in the news now, and in people’s minds and something that they are reacting to, versus something that is maybe a bit more inherent. Something more long-term and something closer to them, that would talk to them, rather than a statistic. The second point I would like to emphasise is that Europe is a broad term. Since the expansion of the European Union into the East from 2004 onwards, we have seen a merger of very different

experiences of Europe, and very different people who consider themselves to be European. We heard of the importance of some of these questions, such as the colonial history of some countries, and how that plays into current politics. In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, the national identity is very much tied up with their own history of oppression from foreign powers. We see a bit of this kind of mixing of these messages and an attempt to build the common European narrative gets lost in the facts of different people with different histories, who fail to see themselves in these discussions.

This is to emphasise that Europe is really a diverse place of diverse histories and experiences, and in trying to build what we call *a European narrative*, it is important to keep that in mind. I think somebody mentioned earlier, that there are people who are “European by necessity”. I think that concept shows that very well. If we look at countries like Romania, where we have had thousands and thousands of people who have left their home country, not because they were wandering to find new Erasmus friends and broaden their horizons, but because they were looking for economic opportunity. That has created a certain sentiment about what Europe means to those people. I would like to show you a selection of data, in order to highlight some of the more interesting trends that we found.



Edgar Oganjesjan

A regular question that we ask is **whether people feel that they are citizens of the EU**. I think it reflects somewhat a certain sentiment, a feeling of being a citizen of something more than your national country, part of something bigger. Generally, it’s a very good indicator but the most recent results show that, in Italy, in fact, it dropped under 50%.

This is the first time since we've started measuring this indicator that we have a country where less than the majority of people feel that they are citizens of the EU. This is a worrying development but again this is very narrow, and within the margin of error.

There is a question on **satisfaction with how democracy works in the EU** from our latest standard Eurobarometer, which was done in the autumn 2020. The survey about the Future of Europe was published last week. We asked, in the context of the upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe, about people's attitudes towards the conference, and how European

citizens can get more involved in the decision-making process. There is a clear indication that people really want to be more involved. But, as we know, the European Parliament election turnouts are historically not so high, and people tend to feel disconnected from what happens at the high levels of Brussels. At the most recent European elections, we saw about a 60% turnout, which was a very good result. Let us see whether that holds up. I do hope so. But as we see from our analysis, dissatisfaction with democracy really ranges from three in four people saying they're satisfied to one in three people.

Mathieu Lefèvre, co-founder and CEO of More in Common

"More in Common conducts research into the drivers of social fracturing and polarisation mapping different segments of the population according to their values, beliefs and sense of group attachments. It published the New Normal report in 2020.⁴ You incorporate political science, psychology and sociology in your methodology, for example, measuring "the psychology of people" in relation to trust, solidarity, identity, history and more.

What is the learning you could share with regards to our interest in "measuring" a European sentiment that encompasses all of those dimensions like trust, solidarity, etc.?"

I think what we should go towards is **how to rekindle this European sentiment? More in Common** tries to understand what divides people and what can bring them together.⁵ What differentiates us is that we ask people less about their opinion on things and more about their psychological orientation, so we measure trust and feelings of **in-group** and **out-group** and threat perception, and so on. Very broadly, what we find is that, when you ask these questions about people's psychology, national audiences break up into three groups. One group we call a **polemic group** (made up of two sub-groups: a very vocal **Open Group** "I love Europe", and a very vocal **closed group** (hates/dislikes Europe). That **polemic group** makes up about a third. Then you have the **Middle group**, who sort of believe in the system but are ambivalent about things. They can hold ambivalent thoughts. Then you have a



Mathieu Lefevre

third group, which we call "**The forgotten** – that make up about 30-40% depending on which country. In our methodology, they have a sort of orientation to the why **they feel left behind**: they're lonely, they have far fewer social contacts, they have very limited sense of an in-group "who is on my team"; **they are very vulnerable to narratives that point the finger at a hostile us-vs-them narrative.**

Very important to the conversation about European sentiment is that no one, apart from our open and our closed group, thinks in single-issue terms. They do not think about Europe as a standalone thing, they think about Europe in terms of how it fits with my family? With my health? With my kids' school, etc. **It is only a small proportion of the population that thinks about Europe at all.** It is also a false dichotomy to think that there are people who, on any given topic – Europe, immigration, whatever – are *for* and *against*.

⁴ *The New Normal?* report More in Common draws conclusions from a survey of 14,000 people on the impacts of Covid-19 on trust, social cohesion, democracy and expectations for an uncertain future in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands and Poland.

⁵ <https://www.moreincommon.com/>

Public opinion is really divided between people who care about this and people who don't really care about it that much, because they don't have time to think about these things.

What does this mean for European sentiment and how could a European sentiment unite us? The first response is that, when messages or speeches or forms of engagement focus on things that connects us, they work better – giving a sense of bond. **Show me how we have more in common, and not division? Show me how we are together, and not apart?** For example, the word diversity, which was mentioned earlier, I think is a wonderful word, but I am in the minority. Most people in Europe think diversity is a little bit stressful because it points to how we are very different and how possibly we are not going to get along. But there are other ways to create bonds so anything that create bonds, **a European sentiment that would create a sense of bonding is going to work.** Agency works very well: Show me how I have control over whatever you are talking to me about? Show me how Europe is something concrete in my life? **Give people a sense of agency, give people a sense of joy, hopeful messages whatever we say in the current environment have a greater capacity to engage.**

The final thing is **nature.** Stories, narratives around nature, perhaps not climate, which feels distant, but nature close to me. Bond agency, joy in nature seems to work.

The last thing I will say is that we conducted a very large project around how are Europeans feeling after the first wave of Covid-19. I want to leave us with a challenge, which is a finding that is both quite depressing and very hopeful. When we asked Europeans *Is Covid-19 a reminder that we should change our system?* the way our economy is organised, their relationship to the environment, **between 55 and 65% of respondents say, “Yes, Covid is a reminder that we need to change our system”.** This is true, among our open groups among our closed groups among our middle groups and among our forgotten groups. That's good! They have hope, they want things to change, they want new stories to be told, they want to get on what we call a new story of us, which I think must include European identity. The bad news is that when you say, “Do you think change is going to come?” Do you think the system as it is designed political, economic, European institutions, the European project, basically the system, can it change? The overwhelming majority of people in all of these groups say, “*NO, the system will not change.*” **So that creates a hope gap.**

I think that is a great avenue for lending a new form of European sentiment, because that is what people want. They have hope but they don't believe it's coming. If we could crack that over the next 10 years, I think we can make European sentiment, perhaps, come alive. Then we could make all of the very beautiful input we heard in the first part of the session, which I think is more important than analysing public opinion, and we could turn it into a reality.

Thomas Fricke, Director, Forum for a New Economy

Experts from around the world are working on finding solutions to the most pressing issues of our times. An insufficient sense of identity, belonging and solidarity has resulted in multi-layered fractures in our societies. Economy and welfare play a major role on Europeans' attitudes about their national governments but also about the EU. How could we engage economic players in our endeavour?



Thomas Fricke

In the context of the current crisis, we are urged to have an economic paradigm shift, and a shift at the EU level. The neoliberal paradigm of the EU is fading away but there is no new paradigm on the horizon (although there are some elements). At the same time, people need and want change. It does not make sense to tackle the crisis (such as the current pandemic) by enhancing competition. There should be a new narrative about common action, about common sense and a common future.

What we are doing as the Forum for a New Economy is trying to develop and push for something like a new economic paradigm. The thinking behind it is that we are coming from four decades of market liberalism, neoliberalism whatever you call it, which has very much formed people and policies. That has a lot to do with our subject of European sentiment. Our basic assumption is that there are a lot of signs and polls and so on, that believe in this old paradigm, which has functioned and which has had a big influence on economic policies, and Europe. That system has been very strong but has started to crash essentially with a financial crisis in 2008. There is no belief, as there has been before, in market liberalism and doing everything in that sense, and that's what you see at any time. There are still liberal forces at some points in economic terms in the technocratic sense, but they generally left.

The big problem is that there is nothing new. This is a typical situation where you get populism, you get people who are trying to step in to this situation. That fits perfectly with what Mathieu said about **the need for something new**. I think when we are talking to people, and even before Corona, and irrespective of it, people had a big need, a wish to get something new. But the situation is, we don't have anything new. There is no new formed paradigm; there are a lot of elements that you can tell, but that is not a paradigm, that is not a narrative, and that is essentially what is missing. I think this is extremely important for this topic and European sentiment.

If you look back in the past, at what has been the case in European policies, they have been very much under the impression of the neoliberal market liberal thinking. This has led to a curious situation where we had more integration, but less in the sense of European sentiment. This is because the ideology of this market liberalism has been that countries should be in competition with each other. It was not about integrating something in a sentimental way, but competing, and that has led to some very not

very helpful situations. During the Eurozone crisis, for example, there has been competition among the Member States. In the midst of the crisis, that was a catastrophe about the European sentiment, because it was about showing that you are better than the others, and it was a catastrophe. The Portuguese wanted to show that they were better than the Greeks, and the Spanish etc.

Now coming back to the current situation, we are in this paradigmatic shift and I think that this is an opportunity, because the new paradigm may be coming up. It will be different, and it should be **much more about common action, about common sense and common future**, like climate, and Corona is there to demonstrate it. I think that the **opportunity now is to have a new narrative around this new paradigm, which is not yet there. It is an opportunity to work on it**, exactly as Mathieu said. There's a lot of space to think about a new paradigm and a new narrative that applies to Europe – in which one could tell a European story, which is about doing common things much more than competing with each other.

Janis Emmanouilidis, Director of Studies, European Policy Centre (EPC), Brussels



Janis A.
Emmanouilidis

*Janis, you are a political analyst, policy consultant and political scientist, and you have published widely on different topics of European integration, including “The Need to Re-EUnite Europe” and the first draft blueprint for the **Conference on the Future of Europe**. What do you make of this European consultation process? Can it lead anywhere?*

Could the Conference on the Future of Europe be a paradigm shift?

I would like to share within four minutes, five thoughts and I hope I will also be able to provoke discussion. The first point has been mentioned but I want to underline it. Maybe we are the wrong ones to discuss the European sentiment. We are not the ones who are representing the big majority. It was said that in the past we would have had these intellectual discussions with people coming from different intellectual fields

at a nice lake. Maybe this is exactly the wrong thing to do. **We probably have to listen more to the marginalised, to the periphery** and ask about what their sentiments are with respect to Europe. Listen to what Mathieu was mentioning when he was talking about the invisible group, the silent majority. Talk to them about how they feel about what the European sentiment is that they are feeling, instead of us having these discussions, which I think often go round in circles.

Second point: **What is Europe?** It has been mentioned, are we talking about Europe in a strict geographical sense, excluding others? Are we talking about Europe as being the European Union? I think we need more clarity. Referring to the Conference on the Future of Europe, I think that it is a big mistake within the Joint Declaration on the Conference that it doesn't mention that future Member States should be observers of that conference, which is about the future of Europe and all those we have promised to become members of the European Union. **We are excluding them from this exercise, which is about the future of Europe.** What a big mistake! I think that Isabell is right and we are limiting too much Europe, and the European Union to its constitution, institutional structure. It is more than

that. I know that we cannot compare the EU to a nation state, but if you talk about your home country, in my case, I have two – Germany and Greece, I do not think about the German constitution and how it is politically functioning. I think about a lot of things, but not about that, and I think – with respect to the EU – we should also do that.

Third point. Yes, sentiment is a lot about emotions and feelings. Feelings of belonging, but at the same time, it is also very much determined by delivery. Is the system able to deliver? Do we feel part of whatever that system is? So yes, it is a lot about emotions and as well a lot about sentiments, but they are very much influenced by the ability of the system to deliver. I think we really need to make this connection.

Fourth point. When we think of the overall situation that we are in, I think that we are living in something which, together with some colleagues, we described as the **age of permacrisis**. We have gone through different crises over the past 15 years. We are talking about these crises, happening since 2007-2008, the financial crisis and the Euro-crisis, economic crisis, the migration crisis, Ukraine's crisis, and we can go on. We are now in the midst of another crisis and everybody is hoping that we will get a new normal out of this, and things will be nice and we will be bored about that new normal. No, we are in the midst of a **permacrisis**. We are opening chapter after chapter. Which means that, if we look into the future, we need to prepare ourselves for the next chapter of the **permacrisis**. That is something that determines the attitude towards things. My son is 19 years old. He has only gone through crises, if you look at it from a macro perspective.

The last point. I do not know what the effects of the latest crisis are. We're still in the midst of it. I cannot

judge even what the effects will be on the health dimension of the crisis, let alone judging the economic and societal effects and the potential political effects of the crisis. Therefore, I think we need to be very humble. What I am sure about is that this crisis will lead to some form of cultural change. **It will have severe cultural consequences**. Natalie was right when she was talking about it being a dramatic moment. Not only because of the deaths, but also because it has affected our society in such multiple ways. We are living in a crisis where we do not know exactly what the consequences are, but we can be sure that they will be dramatic.

And this is where you actually need to have a rethink. We need to have an honest debate about what this crisis means, what the previous crises meant, and what it means to prepare yourself for the next chapters in the age of permacrisis. We need that debate also to bridge or to deal with the **hope gap**, which Mathieu was referring to. Because what we are seeing is that the system needs pressure, in order to live up to the necessities of our times. We are living in major transformational times, and **we need to use every opportunity to put pressure on the system**. This is where potentially the Conference of the Future of Europe can play a role. Because **it can be used as a pressure function to actually deliver on the things we need to deliver on**. I think there is also a big opportunity. I don't think that we need to, while thinking of the cultural consequences, think about the major negative consequences of the Covid-19 crisis. There are many opportunities, but they do not come by themselves. You need the pressure, and that is potentially where you can **use the conference as a mechanism, not as the solution and the magic bullet, which it is not**.

Sophie-Carolin Wagner, Managing Director, Eurozine

'Eurozine is an online magazine and European network linking up more than 90 cultural journals and associates in 35 countries (publishing in 35 languages). It's a space to capture the pulse of Europe and Europeans. Could this space be better used, and if so, how can we critically assess, monitor and report on the development of European sentiments through local correspondents (a kind of Roosevelt story-telling



Sophie
Carolin
Wagner

programme)."

It is incredibly important that we listen to the marginalised voices and listen to how quite often they have a better and deeper understanding than observing it from the centre.

I think we find ourselves at a time where a lot of these classical European values are threatened. I quite liked what Janis has just said about how these are also opportunities, but only then opportunities if we seize them with a certain pressure. Quite often when we talk about Europe, we think about the European Union regulations that build this foundation. This in itself is inherently problematic because that also creates the idea that there is no agency for European citizens, but

it is something that is dictated from a larger corpus, detached from the actual citizens. I think it is quite often that which they also proved to be inherently very beneficial, even if at the time given it still felt like something strange and outside.

One of the things that I have been thinking about in this particular regard is **public service media**. Public service media and media regulations have ensured a democratic discourse and ensured a different discourse than if it was just left to private media, and I think this is important to European legacy. If you think

about the BBC in UK or ZDF in Germany etc. Looking back at these things, it is important when we think about new regulations that we might have to face, for example, when we talk about an **open and fair internet**, an open public space in the digital world, for which the need has become more apparent during the current crisis. Looking back at these things might be particularly important. I quite like this quote – I think it is by Claire Bishop, “Everything is new if you don’t study history”, which I think is an important thing to take note of in this regard.

Pawel Zerka, Policy fellow, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)

“You contributed to ECFR’s Rethink: Europe initiative, which explores and illustrates European cooperation in innovative ways through the EU Cohesion Monitor. You are also engaged in the analysis of European public opinion as part of ECFR’s Unlock initiative. Can you share some of your insights from the latest EU Cohesion Monitor that are relevant to our discussion?”

In ECFR, we are also doing our public opinion polls. I’m involved in this, but I would like to tell you about a different project, which is called **EU Cohesion Monitor**. Through it, I think we tracked something that you wanted to track, which is European sentiment although we call it differently.⁶ And EU Cohesion monitor has been tracking 42 different indicators, from 2007 to 2019.

I just wanted to share with you **two lessons** from this exercise: One is about complementarity between the



*Pawel
Zerka*

individual and structural cohesion, which means that – even if there are cases when people in some countries widely lose confidence in Europe, or when their economy tumbles – there are usually several other types of glue that keep them close to Europe. In this sense, the different sorts of cohesion complement each other.

The other lesson is about **resilience**. What we have seen in our cohesion monitor is that, in the face of various crises, such as the migration crisis, Brexit, the Eurozone crisis, European cohesion

has always recovered. (since the start of our data collection in 2007). Therefore, there is a big question: is the Covid-19 crisis any different, and would the EU still be able to show that resilience in the face of this crisis? At least this perspective on how Europeans and European countries behaved over the past dozen years should give us some reason for hope. So maybe this will serve as an ending – the hope landing.

⁶ <https://ecfr.eu/special/eucohesionmonitor/>

Conclusions by Andre Wilkens, Director, European Cultural Foundation

The first thing to say is that there is no readymade conclusion. My **first conclusion** is that it is a bit more complicated. If it were so easy, somebody would have already done it. If it is so complicated, then there is something we could do about it!

Second, we did not only discuss about the sentiment. We also talked about the viability of this European something. Especially when we talked about the gap of expectations and reality and about the consistent gap there. Isabell has said that the gap is maybe narrowing, but if that gap continues over a long time, there seems to be a problem with the system, and not only with the measurement. We have to look at that.

Mathieu talked about the *Hope gap* and turned it around, adding an **optimistic view**: it is probably good that there are high expectations that are not fulfilled. We only need to fulfil these expectations and then everything will be fine. **For me these two “gaps” – the one between potential and the reality (mentioned by Isabell) and the Hope gap, need more attention: are these valid only for a moment in time, or is there a consistency in them?**

I was surprised that we did not discuss more the issue of the external dimension. This is something that also shapes a sentiment – how other parts of the world are doing.

When I grew up in East Germany during the Cold War, for me, Europe was hope. It was the other side, the better side and my European sentiment was built out of this: “There is something on the other side.” A lot of the European sentiment perhaps in Western Europe at the time was based also on a difference from the

Soviet Union. That ended in 1989. What could replace the ideology, or is it actually replaceable? Maybe because of that, we have a gap between potential and reality.

I found very valuable what Thomas Fricke said about a **new economic narrative**. Europe has started with coal and steel, with an economic narrative for Europe. **At some point, the European economic narrative ran out of steam.** We saw this probably for the first time, probably around the financial crisis but ever since Europe has had difficulties in the economic field, where it used to be quite strong. That has also had an impact on the European sentiment.

There are so many aspects: the starting point by Guido, the issue of data, the historical, the media, the outsiders’ perspectives! I feel a bit overwhelmed at the end of this discussion.

We will create a report and share it with you. Then we will decide how we want to take this forward, as the European Cultural Foundation. I hope we will do this together with other partners, whether it’s in the field of polling and data, or in the field of going back to the historic dimension, or picking up the Canon in the Netherlands.

I am very grateful for all your inputs, which have shown that there is much more to be done than I thought before I entered this seminar. Please go back offline if possible, into the real world. We will get back to you, hopefully soon.

List of participants

Giuliano Da EMPOLI	Writer and journalist, political advisor, former Mayor of Culture in Florence, founder and CEO of Volta, a Milan-based think tank
Ismail EINASHE	Journalist and writer
Janis EMMANOUILIDIS	Policy analyst, Director of Studies, European Policy Centre
Thomas FRICKE	Director, Forum for a New Economy
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